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Allegiances - PART ONE

Dear reader,
Disclaimer: I don't own Warriors, Erin Hunter does. This is obviously a FanFiction. However the characters, the plot, the Clans, and everything else written here belongs to me. Please do not copy! :)

P.S, PLEASE COMMENT MORE

A/N: to any new readers, I have just finished editing this whole book. If you spot any mistakes, please comment on it so I can change it! I'm positive that I've missed a few errors because I'm far from perfect and so is this book, so please don't hold back!

A/N #2: since this book still has many errors, it is undergoing a second editing process.

MOONCLAN

Leader Brightstar - white she-cat with gray stripes and blue eyes
Deputy Sparrowheart - plump gray tabby tom with amber eyes"
Medicine Cat Vinetail - large brown tom with amber eyes (apprentice: Sweetpaw)

Warriors
Sharpfang - gray tom with blue eyes

Stonetooth - brown tabby tom with light green eyes

Softpelt - white she-cat with brown eyes

Adderclaw - brown tom with large white paws and green eyes

(apprentice: Volepaw)

Ashtail - ginger tom with green eyes

Crowflight - black tom-cat with white tail tip, white ears and amber eyes

Swiftbreeze - gray she-cat with green eyes

Rosepetal - gray tabby she-cat with a sleek pelt and blue eyes

Fireshade - orange tom with green eyes and a white tail tip (apprentice: Dawnpaw)

Shadowheart - black tom with amber eyes

Skypelt - big white tom with brown eyes

Bluewing - dark gray she-cat with blue eyes

Sagepelt - golden she-cat with brilliant green eyes

Nightrose - Black she-cat with white paws, a white tail tip and white ear tips

Petalwing - Small cream she-cat with a fluffy tail and blue eyes

Sedgetooth - ginger tom with a white chest, white paws and green eyes

Rainwhisker - dark gray tom with white paws and amber eyes

Grayfur - pale gray and white she-cat with brown eyes

Mousetail - brown tom with hazel eyes

Apprentices
Sweetpaw - cream-color she-cat with brown eyes

Volepaw - large white tom with brown eyes

Dawnpaw - light orange she-cat with brown eyes

Queens
Featherbreeze - light gray she-cat with blue eyes (her kits are Icekit, a tom with a gray pelt, white paws and white underbelly with amber eyes; Dewkit, a tom with a white pelt and blue eyes. Their father is Sparrowheart)

Ripplefur - black expecting she-cat with blue eyes (mates with Skypelt)

Elders
Thrushclaw- old brown tabby tom with light brown eyes

Stripeeyes- almost blind gray tabby tom

DARKCLAN

Leader Sandstar - light ginger she-cat with amber eyes (apprentice: Flamepaw)
Deputy Whiteleap - white tom with black paws, black tail tip, and piercing blue eyes
Medicine Cat Hazelleaf - tawny she-cat with white underbelly and hazel eye

CLOUDCLAN

Leader Swiftstar - large black and white tom cat with green eyes
Deputy Echoleaf - muscular brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Medicine Cat Violettooth - dark ginger she-cat with green eyes (apprentice: Splashpaw)

STREAMCLAN

Leader Lakestar - gray tom cat with light blue eyes and a torn ear
Deputy Moleheart - dark gray tabby tom with green eyes
Medicine Cat Daisyleap - white she-cat with green eyes

MARSHCLAN

Leader Rabbitstar - black and white tom with many scars and brown eyes

Deputy Stoneheart - gray tabby she-cat with green eyes
Medicine Cat Pineheart - brown tabby tom with green eyes (apprentice: Gorsepaw)

THE TERRITORY

MoonClan is located nearest to the hills and mountains, although they live in an oak forest.

DarkClan, having the biggest territory, is filled with oak and pine trees, as well as several small rocky landscapes.

CloudClan live on the moors, where it is open.

StreamClan live on an island upon the lake, where a large willow tree centers the camp.

MarshClan live in a marshy pine forest, though their territory has a partially rocky landscape.

The gathering place is in between the five Clans, but no one has their borders crossing over on the land. In the Gathering, there is a big clearing with a large rock towards the front where the leaders talk. The deputies sit at the bottom of the rock, normally.

Where the medicine cats go to meet StarClan is in a cave, called the Cave of Stars, with a confusing entrance since there is a lot of twists and turns to protect it from intruders. In the cave, there's a special large luminous flower the size of two full-grown badgers that shines upon you to bring you in a dream to StarClan. It's scent is sweet and can easily lull one to sleep, and opens at the touch of moonlight. They call it the Night Flower.

Prologue

Edited ✔ by JackMccannon

The sky was dark, crowded with endless black clouds against the dark blue scenery. A cold breeze rushed past, sending up a chill on Icekit's spine. A faint hiss could be heard in the black distance, and all the kit could think to do was whimper and back up. He knew something was near. In this darkness, all he could see was the faint gray outlines of the trees, and nothing more. Whatever was out there was well-hidden.

Why am I here? thought Icekit. *What's going to happen to me?*

He looked around, and his head was becoming dizzy from the feeling of blindness. In enough time, a shape slithered closer to him, and Icekit could feel it. An unwelcoming scent filled up in his nose, and he backed up until his haunches met the bark of a tree, making him jump with surprise. What was even more surprising was the silhouette of the cat, emerging behind the blend of dark bushes.

Icekit's heart started to beat twice as fast as before.

The cat came closer, his amber eyes glowing in the darkness. Now, it felt like the only thing Icekit could see were those savage-filled, blood-thirsty eyes. They bore into Icekit, making him shriek with terror. As the cat lunged himself forward, Icekit turned leaped out of the way and began running as fast as his little legs could take him.

"No!" Icekit let out a wail of anguish and fear. His voice echoed all around the area. He looked back to see if the cat was still following him, and as soon as he turned, the cat's amber eyes blazed and it was as if he yowled with pleasure as he got closer and closer.

Icekit's heartbeat quickened. He was fear-stricken and didn't know what to do. He ran as fast as he could take himself, before tumbling over the risen roots of a rotting tree. The moment his head hit the

ground, he knew that there was no place he could run, for his pursuer had reached him.

I am going to die!

With great effort, the young kit attempted to stand up on his feet, but it wouldn't work. The darkness could not let him see where he was going.

Suddenly, a flicker of light cast out as a small tip of the moon peeked out of the trees. Icekit took shallow breaths and swiftly caught glimpses of his setting. Surprisingly, the area looked like any other forest, but darker. A sudden yowl snapped Icekit out of it, and then the cat with amber eyes leaped onto him, baring his razor-sharp fangs.

Icekit shrieked in complete terror. Perhaps this was his last day of life; death would envelop him after all.

The tom snorted. "You should listen to yourself," he sneered, his eyes shining with delight. "What a kit, yowling so unpleasantly! A warrior yowls *when* they die, not *before* they die!"

Icekit managed to stare up at the one who had chased and pinned him, revealing a dark-furred tom, with slightly matted fur and amber eyes. *A warrior*, thought Icekit, his pelt bristling. He then mustered up the courage to growl. "Let—let go of me!" he managed to finally say. He used his tiny back claws and raked them against his attacker's thick belly fur, but it was no use. His attacker purred so loudly, it was as if he was growling, and it made Icekit's throat ache.

However, from right behind his attacker, a half moon began to rise, casting out a bright, pale light in the dark area. The cat and Icekit both were surprised, and looked around as everything came into view. Bushes could finally be made out, most of them leafless and covered in thorns and twigs; marshy grounds took over the underpaws of the forest; scarce pine trees and ash trees alike surrounded swamps which were overlapped by hanging vines. They were in a forest, like Icekit had suspected. Yet this forest was unlike any he'd ever imagined in his entire short kit-life.

"What's going on?" Icekit's attacker scowled, still having him pinned down. "It isn't suppose to be bright!" His eyes squinted as he looked up to the moon.

Then, there was silence. For a few heartbeats, the attacker stood over Icekit, waiting and looking around. Icekit remained silent and still, hoping that something good would happen. He saw something twitch in a bush, and out came a light gray she-cat. It looked as if the stars themselves were in her pelt, shining under the brilliant moonlight.

Her eyes shone a delicate blue, and her fur silently rippled in the wind. Finally, she broke the silence. "Twilight Warrior," she meowed, and blinked at Icekit's attacker. "What are you doing to this poor kit?"

Icekit's fur bristled. Her presence made him feel unthinkable things. His ears tingled and his nose twitched, however he did not move in fear of being shredded.

The tom cat stared at the she-cat blankly. "I-I . . ." he stuttered, slowly getting off of Icekit. "But he entered our forest! I didn't have any other choice---"

"We StarClan cats have to come here so much because of broken rules," she snarled. "You know what happens when the rules break."

He snarled back. Icekit watched their expressions. "What else could I have done? Let him wander around?" hissed the warrior.

"You've even taunted the poor kit," the she-cat said, her voice soothing to the extent that it made Icekit's bristled pelt soften. However, what she said was true—he'd been taunted terribly.

She took a few steps forward, and then the Twilight Warrior sprang, outstretching his claws. He then pinned down the she-cat.

She yowled and shoved him off. "I knew I couldn't trust you!" she hissed, swiping her claws at him. The tom growled back at her, and gave her a blow to her ear while she gave him a small, clumsy scratch on his nose.

Now, as the moon shone brightly, the two cat's claws glinted in the light. Each time their eyes came out of view, it shone a ghastly amber or blue, making Icekit squeak as a new fear came through him. What if both he and his savior died?

The gray she-cat shot up on her paws and struggled to pin down the warrior, in which she finally succeeded after much wrestling. He smirked in return, kicking her over and letting his long hindpaws rake her belly. The she-cat screeched as she flipped over, and blood trickled out of her mouth. The moment she collapsed, her body became limp.

The Twilight Warrior leaped away from the gray she-cat, and he slowly turned to Icekit. The kit's fur bristled once more, and his heart pounded faster than before. I am going to die! he thought, squeezing his eyes shut. He knew it was a useless effort to try and run away.

Yet, right before the tom leaped and gave Icekit a final blow, a grunt of pain sounded from the body of the limp gray she-cat. "I-it's not that easy to kill me . . ."

Icekit's eyes opened once more, and the first thing he saw was the gray she-cat again, back on her paws. He gasped. So she hadn't died! The she-cat lunged herself at the Twilight Warrior, catching him from surprise. Her claws met his throat and her body pinned down the tom, so that he wouldn't move.

"Please! Please!" the tom begged as the gray she-cat's claws went deeper in his throat. "Please give mercy! I won't harm the him again. I won't taunt kits, but please give me another chance!" His eyes were filled with the fear Icekit might have had.

The gray she-cat released him. "Fine," she growled. "But know that this is a warning." And at that, she disappeared into the bush she first came from. Icekit's eyes widened as he realized he was left alone with the Twilight Warrior once more.

He swiftly looked over to the tom, who was fighting the urge to kill. He slowly backed away from Icekit. "Y-you were lucky, kit! It seems you'll have a lot on your paws since this was the outcome. What a

burden," he growled as he disappeared into the shadows. Icekit stared after him, trembling and confused. What did the Twilight Warrior mean by that? The moon vanished behind thick dark blue clouds.

It was dark once more, and Icekit knew he was truly alone once again. The only sound to be heard was the whispers in the trees, and the rustle of the bushes in the wind.

But then, another sound filled in his ears, and it was the most silent of all. Icekit slowly stood up, aware that he was still trembling. The sound wasn't of a cat, or any creature that could possibly be lurking in a dark forest, but he knew that it was the sound of death. The scent of death. And then, a vision came into his mind, and horror struck through him.

Death. . . . The word whispered into Icekit's ears, making him freeze. It felt as if blood was rising up from the moist, marshy grounds, and the winds grew stronger, making the bushes rattle and shake harder. The word whispered several times in Icekit's ears, and the last thing he did was dive into the thick and sticky blood, escaping from the scary noise.

Chapter One

Edited ✔ by JackMccannon

A small body above the awoken kit wriggled with excitement, with a white pelt that shone brilliantly in the sun. His happiness beamed towards Icekit, and he realized it was his brother, Dewkit. Icekit batted his littermate away, slowly getting up, aware that his pelt was ruffled.

Dewkit bounced up and down. "Today is the day Brightstar will appoint us to be apprentices!" he meowed with excitement, nudging Icekit until he was fully awake.

The gray soon-to-be-apprentice's heart skipped a beat at the mention of that. However, he was still half asleep to display his excitement toward the fact that he would soon be a step closer to becoming a warrior. "I've nearly forgotten," Icekit admitted, yawning. "I had a terrible dream. I was going to die, and then a cat saved me." He sighed of relief as he realized it was just a dream. He stretched luxuriously, yawning once more before he looked around, spotting his mother racing up toward his side to rasp his fur with her bristled tongue.

Dewkit sighed and looked outside. "I had a weird dream, too. And I was being chased, but suddenly—"

"Yeah, that's the dream!" Icekit's meow was so loud that it woke Ripplefur. The plump queen's eyes jolted open and she jumped. Her belly was full with kits, which were due soon enough.

"Keep still," his mother, Featherbreeze scolded. "And look, you woke Ripplefur!" She sighed as she continued licking Icekit's pelt. "I want you to look perfect when you are apprenticed. It will be something to remember, so you must make a good memory!"

Icekit groaned, nodding his head dramatically. "Yes, yes, I know," he grumbled. He looked up to the top of the rocky den. The shade

was as dark as the setting in his dream, which sent chills up his spine.

It was only a dream, the kit thought, looking unsurely between his mother and brother. After all, he was back in his happy Clan life, nearing a moment that will be one he will never forget—his own apprenticeship ceremony.

Dewkit sat at the mouth of the den and glanced over his shoulder. "There are cats gathering around the Moonrock already," he reported as his voice quivered with anticipation. "Featherbreeze, can we go now?"

Featherbreeze shook her head. "It's not time yet," she told her kits. "We need to wait until Brightstar announces that the ceremony will begin. Then the whole Clan will be called together."

Icekit twisted away from his mother's tongue as Ripplefur chuckled from the back of the den. "It won't be long now," she gently reassured Icekit and Dewkit. She curled once more protectively around her own stomach, but kept her head up as she watched both of the kits.

"You're coming, right?" Icekit asked Ripplefur, who seemed to be slowly falling back asleep. "You said it won't be long. If you fall asleep again, you will miss it!" He ran up to the queen and gently batted her with his paws.

Ripplefur let out a deep purr. "Of course I'm coming. I would never miss something so important." She gave Icekit a soft and reassuring smile, and he smiled back as his brother dropped by his side, curious as to what they were talking about.

Featherbreeze returned over Icekit and began to lick him again, getting out all of the moss that clung to his pelt, and she even smoothed down his fur. He allowed her to do so, because after all, he wished to look presentable in front of the Clan. Dewkit already looked clean, however, and his pelt was handsome especially in the sun. Before the two kits knew it, a voice boomed over the Clan.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the

Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" Brightstar called. She stood tall at he top of her den. All cats who weren't in the clearing already left their meals and slowly exited their dens, chattering amongst themselves about who would become new mentors.

Both Dewkit and Icekit bounced with excitement. "It's time!" Dewkit squeaked. Just before they left the den, Featherbreeze stopped them.

"Oh, no!" she ordered. "You two are becoming *apprentices*. No bouncing around like little kits! Hold your chins up high and walk sensibly. You must make a good impression."

Icekit rolled his eyes. "Yeah, understood," he muttered. Featherbreeze nodded of approval, and then Dewkit ran up beside him. "Let's go, then!" Icekit eagerly said.

Dewkit gave an eager nod, and side by side, the two kits walked out of the nursery den for the last time. They looked around, eyes filled with excitement and fear. At the front of the crowd of cats, Icekit could see his father, Sparrowheart, standing under the Moonrock. His chin was held high as well as he watched his sons file into the clearing. Icekit also spotted his old denmates Sweetpaw, Dawnpaw and Volepaw, who all stood side-by-side.

Icekit felt proud that all these cats were watching him.

I'm going to be an apprentice! he excitedly recalled yet again. *What a grand day!*

"I've called you all together for the most important steps in becoming a warrior," Brightstar began. "Icekit and Dewkit have reached their sixth moon, and it's time for them to become apprentices." She looked down to where the two brothers stood. "Come forward."

Icekit and Dewkit trotted in the middle of the big circle that the Clan formed around them. Then, they looked back up to Brightstar. Her blue eyes shone with pride as she gazed over her thriving Clan and the two young kits.

"Icekit, from this day forward until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Icepaw," Brightstar meowed.

"Icepaw! Icepaw!" The Clan chanted. Icepaw's new name rang in his ears, making his entire pelt prick with excitement. He stood a bit taller, basking in the attention.

"StarClan," Brightstar went on, and she turned her gaze towards the greenleaf sky. "Guide this new apprentice so he will make the right choices on becoming a warrior."

Icepaw thought about the StarClan cats that watched him, and he looked up to the sky as well, praying that he'd be the best apprentice ever. Brightstar's gaze traveled through the crowd of cats, making Icepaw think about who would be his new mentor.

Finally, the MoonClan leader spoke up. "Ashtail," she finally said. The ginger tom stood up. "You will mentor Icepaw. You were a very great warrior throughout the moons, and you deserve to instruct your first apprentice."

Icepaw bounded over to his new mentor, and his eyes met Ashtail's, who looked pleased to have Icepaw as an apprentice. They touched noses, and Icepaw felt delighted. *I know that Ashtail is an amazing warrior*, he recalled with excitement. Although young, Ashtail was one of the Clan's best hunters and fighters. And now everything he knew would be passed on to Icepaw! How could this day get any better?

"I promise I will be an outstanding apprentice," he vowed out loud to Ashtail, who nodded of approval. Icepaw nodded back, and they turned to Brightstar to watch the ceremony end with his brother.

"And Dewkit," she meowed as she turned to him, flicking her tail over to the young tom. He copied Icepaw's movements by standing taller and prouder. "From this day forward until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Dewpaw." She paused for a heartbeat. "And I know very well that StarClan will watch over you as well in your journey to become a warrior."

"Dewpaw!" the Clan called. Icepaw felt the happiness for his brother

swell in him, and he felt that he chanted the loudest. "Dewpaw!"

Then, the white-furred leader's tail swept across the crowd of cats and pointed to one of the cats in the older warriors' groups. "Mousetail," Brightstar announced. "You will become Dewpaw's mentor. You have good experience in training apprentices, and you must pass on your knowledge to one more before retiring to the elder's den."

Dewpaw walked over to his new mentor. He and Mousetail touched noses and also muttered their silent greetings towards one another just like Icepaw has done with his own new mentor. Mousetail's eyes shone with joy as he greeted his new apprentice.

Then, the Clan began chanting once more. "Dewpaw! Icepaw! Dewpaw! Icepaw!"

Icepaw's heart burst with pure happiness and joy as the warriors gathered to congratulate them. Brightstar dismissed the meeting, and most cats returned to what they were doing before, though some stayed, including Icepaw's parents and friends.

Sparrowheart purred and looked down at both of his kits. "I am so proud of you two," he meowed as he nuzzled the two of them. His eyes sparkled with many emotions—and some were unreadable, as if he knew something he wished to share. However, he mostly seemed as happy as the Clan, Icepaw noticed.

Dewpaw purred, his chest puffing out. "Thank you!" he said. "We shall be the best apprentices ever!"

Featherbreeze nuzzled him, and then Icepaw. "Why, of course."

"And I expect nothing less from the both of you youngsters," Mousetail stated. "You two will be great apprentices." He looked down to the both of them.

Featherbreeze dipped her head in the direction of the two mentors. "I'm sorry," she told them. "You can go and start your training. I'm expected to join a border patrol now."

"It's okay," Ashtail said, dipping his head back.

Sparrowheart and Featherbreeze began to leave side by side.

Sweetpaw was the next to walk up and nuzzle Icepaw. "You did it," the medicine cat apprentice exclaimed. She turned to Dewpaw. "Both of you!"

"Yeah," Volepaw added. "Now we can all *really* practice fighting!"

Dawnpaw nodded. "We all can hunt and train together, too!" she said looking over at Dewpaw, who already looked fierce.

But then Ashtail murmured, "Though the sooner we start our training, the better. We've been having bickers with DarkClan, and if we have all the warriors we can get to fight, the better it will be."

Mousetail nodded in agreement. "I feel the same way," he added, looking around. "I want to be ready if they launch a surprise attack on us. Ever since the bickers we weren't allowed to travel with no less than three."

"Oh," Icepaw said, looking to his paws. "I understand. So can we start out training?" He looked up hopefully at his mentor, who had a serious look in his eyes.

"Of course," Mousetail meowed, nudging Ashtail. "Perhapswe can come along with the both of you, too. All the other apprentices were going to leave for hunting."

"Yeah, so we have to go," Dawnpaw piped up. Her brother nodded an agreement as she added, "And I think Sweetpaw has medicine stuff to do."

Sweetpaw gave an exasperated sigh. "I'll be collecting horsetail, I'll have you know!" she stated hotly, raising her chin. "And you'd better be happy, because it has some great uses." She stalked off to the medicine den, ready to leave with Vinetail.

"I want to hunt!" Dewpaw finally said with excitement.

Ashtail slowly shook his head. "We were hoping to start on some battle moves first. Then hunting," he informed. Dewpaw's eyes showed signs of disappointment but then he nodded. Icepaw didn't

understand how his brother could be disappointed. He was very eager to train for battle, so shouldn't Dewpaw feel the same?

Before he forgot, he turned over his shoulder and looked at Dawnpaw and Volepaw. "Bye!" Icepaw called as they began to depart from one another. "When we all get back, maybe you can show us the basics in hunting?"

"Yeah, we'll do that!" Volepaw called. "Bye!"

Then, Ashtail and Mousetail silently began leaving the camp together, slipping through the thorn bush tunnel as their apprentices followed. Icepaw was careful not to get any thorns stuck in his pelt, and he could tell Dewpaw was being careful as well. As soon as the two apprentices were out, they gasped as they looked around at the large oak trees, the undergrowth and many bushes.

Of course, Icepaw has been out of camp for a few heartbeats once as a kit to take a glance at the forest, but now, it feels so different than before. Icepaw saw Dewpaw dash ahead of him, and Icepaw began to follow his brother with utter excitement.

Mousetail was leading the group of cats, and the walk wasn't very far from camp. Icepaw saw a lot of trees and ponds and streams along the way, and he also scented a lot of prey. When they got to the Training Hollow, he could feel that within, the ground was soft dirt covered with old, torn moss, and there was a stream in the back of the hollow that was most likely used for refreshments.

The fresh scents of the warriors and apprentices that walked before him in the hollow made Icepaw happy. He liked this scent for the fact that he knew that soon enough he'd be one of the best fighters of MoonClan, and his mark would one day be among the many paw prints, scratches, and scents of the Training Hollow---no, among the entirety of the whole forest!

Mousetail walked to the center of the clearing. "Alright!" he meowed. "First, Ashtail and I will show you how two warriors would fight. We'll pin down and dodge first. That's the most basic of moves."

"I'll be the DarkClan warrior," Ashtail meowed, leaping to the center of the clearing. Mousetail nodded, and Ashtail added to the apprentices, "Watch closely."

Icepaw nodded, leaning closer to make sure he didn't miss anything, and then the two warriors clashed. He knew that their claws were sheathed. Mousetail leaped over Ashtail, pinning him down, and instantly, Icepaw's memory of the Twilight Warrior and the gray-she cat flashed in his mind. His heartbeat quickened, but then slowed down as he remembered that these were only his Clanmates.

Then, Ashtail kicked Mousetail over and the older warrior flipped off, landing on his paws. As Ashtail was turning around, Mousetail leaped on Ashtail once more, and grabbed his opponent's neck. He pretended to bite down hard.

He let go of Ashtail. "That's how you do it," Mousetail said. "But I don't expect you to be killing the DarkClan warrior. That only makes you lower than they can ever be."

Dewpaw nodded. "Can we try it now?" he begged. "Please?" His blue eyes met his mentor's hazel ones. "Me and Icepaw will get it on our first try!"

Mousetail sighed. "Well, sure. I'd like to see how you imitate our moves," he meowed, stepping aside. Ashtail followed him. "Go ahead and do not unsheathe your claws. It's against the rules when you practice."

Icepaw turned to his brother and gave a tiny nod. Icepaw copied what Mousetail did, and lunged. Dewpaw leaped out of the way, and Icepaw cursed under his breath as he tried to catch his brother again. He swiped, but he didn't feel Dewpaw's soft white pelt under his paw.

Ashtail sighed and put a paw between the two apprentices. "Icepaw," he said, catching his eyes. "In order to pin your brother, you need to be more swift---and think of ways to get to him other than lunging."

"Yes, Ashtail," Icepaw panted, glancing over at Dewpaw. The white

apprentice tom stopped, catching his breath as well, and Icepaw immediately flung himself forward. He leaped over his brother, but grabbed him with his claws, dragging Dewpaw along with him.

"Ah!" Dewpaw yowled. "You caught me!"

Icepaw felt pleased. "And now your dead!" he declared, pretending to bite down into his neck like on what Mousetail did with Ashtail.

"Excellent move," Ashtail praised. "You two are going to be great warriors. I can already see that!" His eyes let out a warm glow, and Icepaw stood up, feeling good about himself. He enjoyed the sensation of battle. He just realized how good it was to have his muscles outstretched, and his claws flexed as he challenged another cat---something that he was never able to do in the camp. He wondered if Dewpaw felt the same sensation.

"Now let's see Dewpaw pin you down, Icepaw," Ashtail said. Mousetail was already sitting in the back of the clearing as Ashtail padded up to him to take a seat next to him. That was a cue to begin.

As soon as Dewpaw charged for Icepaw, the small apprentice leaped over him, landing right behind him. For a quick moment, he saw Mousetail's ears flick of interest. But as Icepaw watched, Dewpaw grabbed Icepaw's pelt and pinned him down, pretending to rake his face with his sheathed claws.

"I did it!" Dewpaw exclaimed. He got off of Icepaw, and his tail swished from side to side. "I did it, Mousetail. Did you see?"

Mousetail's whiskers twitched of amusement. "Yes, I saw it, Dewpaw," he said. "Sparrowheart will be so proud of you." He began to purr.

"Thank you," Icepaw said, purring as well. "Show us some more moves, please. Then maybe all of the warriors and apprentices can be proud!"

* * *

Dusk was approaching quickly. The day was long with battle

training, and Icepaw sat down with exhaustion, panting heavily. He craved water, since his throat felt hot and sticky, and he was hungry as well. He had just realized he hadn't eaten since yesterday. As Icepaw waited for Dewpaw to finish his lesson with Mousetail, he let his shoulders relax, and closed his eyes.

He faced upwards, letting the cool breeze ruffle his pelt. He didn't know being an apprentice was such hard work, and today was only but the first day. He had all his excitements in the first steps of becoming a warrior, but now he knew that his exhaustion was only the beginning.

Finally, Dewpaw and Mousetail broke apart, panting almost as heavily as Icepaw was. They had finished their battle training, and it was time to go back to camp. Icepaw has never felt more relieved in his whole entire life.

Ashtail dropped in beside him as they began to walk out of the Training Hollow. Icepaw looked up at his mentor. "Are we gonna do battle training tomorrow, too?" he asked, hoping that they would do something different.

"No, we're not," Ashtail replied. Icepaw tried to hold a sigh of relief. "But tomorrow, we will certainly start your apprentice duties. You know, apprentices have to work for their Clan, too."

He groaned. "Yeah, I know. Dawnpaw and Volepaw would always complain about that to me," he murmured. Icepaw's hopes in hunting dropped as they continued walking.

Mousetail stopped the patrol, and then a river sound entered his ears. "C'mon," he meowed, leading them into a different direction. "You must be thirsty. The stream within the training hollow can never properly quench a throat."

"You can say that again!" Dewpaw commented out loud.

Mousetail began leading them closer and closer to the sound of rippling and crashing water. It made Icepaw's throat ache badly to have the cold, moist liquid in his mouth. Sparks came into view, and Icepaw realized it was a large river running through the

ground.

"Go ahead," Mousetail meowed. "Then, we can go back to camp."

Icepaw raced up ahead on Dewpaw's heels for the river water, and immediately began gulping down the fresh water. He sighed of relief, and stuck his paws in, then began to clean his dirty gray fur with the relieving cold water. He felt good. *At least we can travel around in the territory*, he thought, recalling his six moons of being confined in camp. *Now we can drink fresh water. We don't have to worry when they will bring us mossballs anymore!*

Ashtail and Mousetail walked up beside Icepaw, also taking laps of the water. Icepaw licked his lips dry as he waited for the two warriors to finish. When they were done drinking, they began to head back to camp. Icepaw was glad that he could see more territory.

"When will you show me around the MoonClan grounds?" Icepaw asked his mentor, trying to start a conversation. Dewpaw and Mousetail talked silently behind them.

"Maybe I can show you around a bit tomorrow when you finish your duties," Ashtail replied. "Or maybe after tomorrow. I can show you hunting, too."

Icepaw nodded happily. "Thank you, Ashtail," he said. Soon, the camp came entrance came into view. It sounded like almost everyone was there, and he raced ahead as soon as the prey scent filled his nose.

Overwhelmed with hunger, he raced past Sharpfang and Nightrose, who were guarding the camp. He was immediately stopped by Dawnpaw. The older apprentice gave him a warm smile. She was no bigger than Icepaw, and was only two moons apart from him.

"Want to share this?" she asked, pushing the vole close to him. Icepaw took a quick sniff from it, and was delighted to find that it was warm and fresh.

"Yes, please," he said, taking the first bite. "I was so hungry!"

Dawnpaw let out a small *mrrow* of laughter and took a bite as well, and then Icepaw took the third bite. The process went on until the vole was completely finished. Icepaw was satisfied that his belly was now full and warm, and he could see that Dewpaw felt the same thing after finishing his mouse.

"C'mon," Dawnpaw meowed. "Let me and Volepaw show you where you'll sleep." Icepaw nodded, and she began leading the two apprentices to the den. It was dark now, and the night patrol was already leaving.

When they got there, Volepaw was waiting patently, setting up two moss nests. He covered them with feathers and surrounded them with sticks. "Here!" Volepaw called, and patted the newly made bed with his tail. "All done!"

"Thank you," Dewpaw yawned, choosing the nest closer to the middle of the den.

"No problem," Volepaw replied.

Icepaw, without saying a word, curled up in the spare nest in the back of the den. He felt comfortable. He use to always sleep with Dewpaw and Featherbreeze, but now he finally had the chance to be alone. Icepaw fell asleep with one last thought on his head.

I am finally an apprentice!

Chapter Two

Edited ✔ by JackMccannon

The next morning, Icepaw's eyes slowly opened. He could see that all of his denmates weren't there. He was alone. Slowly getting up, the warm dawn air hit Icepaw's gray fur. He could tell it was ruffled and little moss pieces clung to it. Then, he remembered that he'd be doing apprentice duties today. He heaved a deep sigh, picking out the pieces of moss that clung on to him.

As he licked his ruffled fur, he thought that all he wanted to do today was rest. Yesterday's training really pushed past his own limits, and all of his muscles were sore. He wondered if Dewpaw felt the same way.

The moment his head lifted, he noticed that a cat was approaching the apprentice den. Icepaw made out that the scent was his mentor. Ashtail stopped at the entrance of the den and peered inside, to see his apprentice grooming his fur on his nest. For a moment, Icepaw pretended not to notice his mentor and continued to lick his fur, until Ashtail cleared his throat.

"Time to start your apprentice duties," he finally said. The young apprentice gave out a sad sigh. "Don't worry, it won't be too bad."

Icepaw nodded, walking out of his den followed by a long stretch. "So," he began with a yawn. "What are we going to start on? Cleaning the elder's den? Getting water?" *I can't believe I have to do any of these things*, he angrily thought. *Hunting and fighting should be more important!*

"No, we're moss collecting with Volepaw," he meowed. Icepaw nodded, and then he could see the larger apprentice talking to his sister, Sweetpaw, in the medicine den.

"Let's go, then," Icepaw murmured, slowly walking out of the

medicine den. "Where did Mousetail and Dewpaw go, anyway?"

Ashtail shrugged. "I think they went on a border patrol to DarkClan. Those nasty furballs are always getting their scents over the border on purpose." He began padding forward, and Icepaw's tail drooped. *Dewpaw is going on a border patrol, while I'm stuck here to collect moss*? he thought with utter disbelief. *I wanted to see the territory more!*

Icepaw's tail flicked angrily as he followed Ashtail to the medicine den. He didn't want to do such apprentice duties when his talents could be trained and sharpened and put to use elsewhere. He wanted to learn how to hunt and do border patrols and learn the territory. He felt that it was unfair, and he envied Dewpaw.

As they reached the medicine den, Icepaw could see Sweetpaw's beautiful pelt as she rushed around the den. She appeared to be sorting herbs, mosses and leaves of all kinds as she talked with Volepaw. Icepaw was impressed at her multitasking skills. He realized it must be a hard job to be a medicine cat, with all that remembering and additional set of rules she was required to follow.

Finally, Sweetpaw stopped and noticed Ashtail and Icepaw standing and waiting. "Volepaw," she mumbled through a mouth of herbs. "Look, your patrol is here. Go on, I have to get this organized before Vinetail returns . . ."

Volepaw whirled around. "Oh, good morning," he meowed, his eyes glinting from the light of the rising sun. Turning back to his sister he added, "Alright then, Sweetpaw. I'll be going now."

Sweetpaw nodded, and Volepaw's attention turned towards Icepaw and Ashtail. Icepaw's mentor said, "Good. Now let's go and collect our moss, shall we?"

"Yes!" Volepaw beamed.

Icepaw didn't understand why Volepaw seemed so happy. *What is so good about collecting moss?* He walked a little slower with his tail a claw-length away from the ground, dropping behind the two other cats gloomily.

Ashtail turned behind him. "Come on!" he called from up ahead. "The moss isn't going to wait forever!" Groaning, Icepaw pushed himself forward and began walking next to his mentor. Volepaw was right on the other side of him, excitingly bounding forward. "Now that's better."

Icepaw didn't reply, but couldn't help but give a flick of annoyance from his ears. *He probably thinks I'm a terrible apprentice for feeling so foul,* Icepaw thought. It's because all he wanted to do was explore!

They were now out of the camp entrance. Icepaw froze, the fur on his pelt rippling like it did the day before when he first left the camp as an apprentice. He remembered his excitement, his happiness and his eagerness. Even though all those feelings didn't return, he still felt a prick of satisfaction to see the forest from the outside.

"What are you so suddenly happy about?" Volepaw asked, noticing his denmate's hesitation. "I mean, they are just the same old trees and plants. Nothing exciting."

Icepaw looked at Volepaw with disbelief. "But . . ." He looked around. "The forest isn't the same. It feels different than yesterday! The leaves are all in different places and look—the plants—they moved, too!" Icepaw's heart raced faster. "And the colors seem richer. The scents shifted!"

It's like stepping in a completely different forest from yesterday! he thought.

Ashtail purred. "You seem to appreciate the forest like a warrior would," he said, looking at Volepaw and Icepaw. "Both of you. After all, Volepaw, you really seem to know this forest like the back of your paw."

"I suppose," Volepaw mewed, giving his chest a lick of embarrassment.

The moss-gathering patrol began to move again. This time, Icepaw snapped out of his daze. He knew how mad he was just moments ago, and suddenly recalled the reason for his feelings. *Yes, that's*

right. I'm going to collect moss. He suppressed a sigh.

They began walking away from the direction of the Training Hollow and the camp. He looked around. Maybe he'd get to see the MoonClan territory like Dewpaw was? He padded beside Ashtail.

"Where are we going?" Icepaw asked, curious. He suddenly knew that he'd get to see a lot of territory, for they were going to a part of the forest that he hasn't been to before.

Ashtail didn't speak. It was Volepaw who did. "We're going near the StreamClan borders where the biggest lake in our own territory is found," he informed. "That's where most of the moss grows and where we sometimes do swimming lessons and fishing lessons."

Icepaw froze. "Don't only StreamClan cats swim and fish?" he asked again. Then he remembered once or twice he'd taken and eaten fish from the fresh kill pile when he was still a kit.

"Yeah," Ashtail said, dropping into the conversation. "But MoonClan always know the best way to survive. We just learn things for ourselves. No one told us we can't. But only two of us got the hang of swimming. Brightstar thought it was necessary for some cats to know."

"Though sometimes StreamClan cats get angry about it," Volepaw put in. Ashtail gave a small *mrrow* of laughter. It seemed like they didn't care what the other Clans thought of them.

As the patrol walked through the forest, the trees became less dense, followed by less bushes and plants. A fishy scent was caught into Icepaw's nose, and he looked around. In the close distance, a large lake rippled and shimmered under the sunlight. A willow tree stood right at the edge of the water, its leaves dangling low enough to touch the surface. He looked at it with amazement.

He'd never seen a willow tree before! Icepaw suddenly remembered that there were different types of trees. All he ever saw was oak, but he knew there were pine and willow, he just never really thought about it.

"Are we here?" he asked, remembering what Volepaw said about the lake.

"Almost," Ashtail meowed. "Just a bit closer to the border, and there should be the cave of mosses. It's amazing." His eyes shone, and Icepaw assumed that he was only getting a memory of the area.

Volepaw bounced excitedly. "If you don't count the Cave of Stars, this is the most amazing place to be. And, out of all the other Clans, it's in MoonClan!"

Ashtail nodded. "That's right," he purred. Icepaw began to realize why Volepaw was so excited now. All the warriors in the Clan must love to come here. *Yes*! Icepaw eagerly thought. *Now I can tell Dewpaw something exciting!*

Volepaw began to run up ahead. "It's just about here!" he meowed out loud, and stopped at a patch of grass. "It's hidden so no one else can find it."

Icepaw nodded, trotting up. When he was close enough to see the entrance, his eyes widened with disbelief. "This is as narrow as a rabbit hole!" he said, afraid that he might not get through. He looked through it. "And it's dark."

Ashtail sighed. "Wait until you get to the other side," he said. Looking down to Icepaw, he added, "Hold your breath, flatten your fur and squeeze through. If you get stuck, call for help and we'll pull you out. I'll go first." Icepaw nervously nodded.

And then, Ashtail's ears flattened on his head. He crouched down so low that his belly fur swept on the ground, and he began to crawl forward until he was not seen. A few moments later, a small and a faint voice called, "I made it! Icepaw, now it's your turn!"

Icepaw's heart stopped. "Wait, what?" He said, his pelt pricking with anxiety. "W-what if I get stuck?" He looked at Volepaw, who seemed calm and eager.

"Don't worry," Volepaw soothed. "Go through. If Ashtail can make it, so can you. It's what warriors do, you know?"

When Volepaw said warrior, it made Icepaw realize he was right. "Okay, I'll go," he said in a shaky voice. He copied Ashtail by sinking low to the ground, flattening his ears. "I'll see you on the other side." He sucked in his breath and held it.

Then, he began to go forward. When Icepaw reached the middle, sudden darkness hit his eyes, and he suddenly remembered his dream where he was engulfed by darkness. He gasped, but not much air reached his mouth. He coughed, trying to back up. He now knew why Ashtail said to hold his breath.

Icepaw realized he was stuck. "Help!" he called, trembling. Icepaw knew he was panicking, but he couldn't help it. The most scariest moment of Icepaw's life was that very dream he had of the Twilight Warrior cat, and it all happened in the darkness.

"Don't worry!" Ashtail's voice sounded from up ahead. "Come forward. It's good here, trust me!"

Icepaw tried to reassure himself and fierce fully pushed forward. When he felt that he needed to take a big gulp of breath, he leaped out of the other side and gasped, taking in as much air as he possibly could.

"Thank StarClan," he breathed, looking at his paws. At that same moment, Volepaw's head popped out of the small entrance as he climbed inside the cave. That's when Icepaw realized: it wasn't dark in here at all! He looked up, and his eyes widened. The mosses were glowing.

"Wow! This is amazing!" he exclaimed.

Ashtail chuckled. "That was my first reaction too," he said. "But now let's get to the moss gathering. The quicker we get this back to camp, the more time we have for training."

Icepaw nodded.

"So, what you need to do is claw at the top like this—"Ashtail curled his paw and swiped off the pieces of dirt that held the moss to the ceiling, causing a clean piece to fall to the ground "—to make sure

that no dirt or rocks cling to it. The moss needs to be clean for the nursery and the elder's den. If not, you'll have to clean it later."

"Okay," Icepaw said. "How often to warriors come to gather here?" He began to copy Ashtail's movements to separate the moss from dirt and rocks.

"Every quarter moon, since it takes time for the moss to regrow," Ashtail replied. Volepaw also worked on some pieces, and it seemed as if the older apprentice has gotten the most of it already. "And we don't collect all of it. There needs to be some left so we can see."

Icepaw nodded and cut off his second piece. He growled when he realized he was bringing the dirt and rocks along with it.

Volepaw looked over and realized what Icepaw was doing. He walked up. "You don't need to cut the whole moss, just enough so that a cat can sleep on it," he informed. He cut off a piece of moss as an example, but then Icepaw realized he didn't cut the top part. "See?"

"I see," Icepaw said, trying it for himself. He saw that the moss was perfectly clean like Volepaw's. The older apprentice nodded and got back to work. Icepaw began to cut moss again, and this time it was easier.

When there were only three pieces of moss left, Ashtail nodded of satisfaction. "We can go back to camp and hunt now," he said.

"We're going to hunt?" Icepaw asked with sudden excitement.

"Why not?" Ashtail meowed. "It's right before sunhigh, so we have plenty of time." Icepaw was now very satisfied. They all picked up their bundles into their jaws and crawled out. It wasn't as bad climbing out as it was climbing in. Volepaw came out last and spat his big bundle to the ground, taking in a deep breath of fresh air.

Soon, the moss gathering patrol got back to camp with Icepaw happily in the lead. The scent of the home he was raised in came into his jaws, and he bounded to camp with his portion. Volepaw was right at his heels. When he entered the camp, Dewpaw was

already there.

Icepaw went to the medicine den and dropped his moss off to Sweetpaw and Vinetail before catching up to Dewpaw.

"You will not believe what happened today!" Dewpaw meowed first, his eyes shining bright. "We almost got into a fight with DarkClan!" Icepaw's heart dropped. This wasn't as exciting as what he did today. "It all started off with a small quarrel, and one of the warriors leapt at us, but then his own Clan member pinned him down!"

Icepaw nodded. "Oh," he said. "That's . . . cool." He sighed, now feeling too jealous to share what he's done today.

"So I heard you went moss collecting," Dewpaw went on, feeling pride that he has done more than Icepaw.

"Th-that's not true!" He spat. "I mean, it is, but I almost died!"

Dewpaw snorted. "You almost died collecting moss?" he asked, and his whiskers began to twitch. Icepaw growled, anger and embarrassment replacing his jealousy.

Don't he dare twitch his whiskers at me!

"No!" Icepaw defender. "I couldn't breathe—I almost lost air! And you know, I saw territory up to StreamClan, I saw the biggest lake in the territory, I saw a willow tree and I even saw the moss caves! It was *amazing*!" Dewpaw shrugged, and Icepaw went on, trying to get his brother jealous, "you know . . . it's an honor going to a cave like that."

Mousetail walked up behind Dewpaw and said, "Icepaw's right. The Moss Cave is very beautiful."

"That's okay," Dewpaw said. "I'd rather see a fight than see a cave."

Mousetail sighed, and then Ashtail padded up, stopping beside Icepaw. Now he didn't feel in a too good mood to be hunting.

Icepaw's mentor touched his head with his nose. "Let's leave," he

meowed. "Dewpaw and Mousetail agreed to come with me." He looked up at them, and they nodded.

What? Icepaw growled in his head. *I wanted the forest all to myself! I don't need Dewpaw to brag to me about how big his first catch was!*

Angrily, Icepaw stormed to the entrance of the camp with Dewpaw and their mentors following. He stopped when he left for the third time, looking around. Nothing changed except some leaves and plants and branches.

"Wait, Icepaw!" Ashtail called. "You don't know where we're going. You have to follow me!"

Ashtail walked ahead with Mousetail following, and then Dewpaw dropped in right beside his brother. The white tom gave a friendly smile, but Icepaw angrily avoided his brother's gaze. Dewpaw sighed, and Icepaw began to speed up.

Dewpaw caught up once more. "Look," he meowed. "Sorry for bragging. I was just excited."

Oh, were you? Icepaw thought. Instead of spouting back a smart remark, he just sighed.

"Just try not to get me jealous back next time," Dewpaw continued, still trying to catch his brother's gaze. But Icepaw didn't look up once. "I don't like fighting with you."

Shut up!

"So let's work together in hunting, okay?" Dewpaw hopefully looked at his brother, and Icepaw sighed and nodded, although he didn't really mean it. They padded up side by side to their mentors.

After a few moments of walking, they finally stopped. "We're here," Mousetail informed, looking around. "This isn't the best place to catch prey, but all the hunting patrols are searching in the best areas. So, this will have to do."

"Yup," Ashtail agreed. "Now, let's get started with the basic hunting crouch." Mousetail sat down and nodded for Ashtail to continue. He

watched the younger warrior carefully. "You need to go very low to the ground. Kind of like what we needed to do to get through the tunnel into the cave of misses, Icepaw."

Icepaw nodded, and crouched so he was in the position he was in earlier. Dewpaw did the same, and both of their white bellies touched the ground.

Ashtail purred of approval. "You need to make sure you're downwind of the prey so that they won't catch your scent," Icepaw's mentor went on. He began to slither forward. "You creep up on the prey . . ." He leaped and shredded a leaf. "And then pounce!"

"Excellent!" Mousetail said.

Ashtail nodded, and Dewpaw said, "So, it's like this?" He began to creep forward, slowly in the dense undergrowth, and then as a leaf twirled in the sky as it fell, he leaped up and clawed it. It shredded like Ashtail's leaf.

Mousetail gave an approving nod. "That was a perfect leap, Dewpaw," his mentor complimented. "Now Icepaw, you try."

"Okay," Icepaw said, determined to do better than his brother. He didn't know why he felt so bitter. Icepaw crouched down, and spotted a loose twig of a tree. Icepaw's tail lashed, and he began to pace forward. Hiding in a patch of grass and aware that he was being watched, Icepaw leaped up and snatched the twig of the tree. "I did it!"

Mousetail purred. "Very well, Icepaw. But you cant lash your tail. That only makes it easier for the prey to see or hear you."

Icepaw's ears flattened. "But I still did good, right?"

"Of course!"

Icepaw nodded, now wanting to catch prey. He opened his jaws and breathed in the air, trying to find a scent. As he searched the air, a sudden yowl of triumph sounded in his ears. It was Dewpaw.

His brother ran up, and a small limp body hung from his jaws. "I

caught a vole!" he said with excitement. Icepaw's eyes widened as he realized it was a big and plump one, too.

"I'll catch a squirrel!" declared Icepaw. Dewpaw smiled and nodded with none of the jealousy that Icepaw had. He felt intimidated. "I'll be right back."

Nervously, Icepaw crept away, still tasting the air. He stopped as he scented what he needed. In the distance, he spotted the gray fur of a squirrel gnawing on a nut. Icepaw's eyes narrowed, and he began to creep closer to it, trying not to jump of excitement or let his tail lash. *I'll show you, Dewpaw, that not only* you *can overcome the forest.*

He smiled slightly, and the squirrel froze. Icepaw suddenly realized that he had forgotten to go downwind. The squirrel knew that Icepaw was there! It stood upright on its hindlegs, looking around with caution as it tasted the air. At any moment, it will run. *It's now or never*, Icepaw thought over and over. Sucking in a deep breath, he leaped from the undergrowth and gave chase.

The squirrel squealed at the sight of the cat and sprinted in the opposite direction. Icepaw pounded hard on the ground, suddenly remembering being chased in his dream. He almost tripped over a tree root, but realized it was in his way before leaping over it. He shook his head from the memory of the dream and concentrated on the squirrel's body. He tried to make himself focused on his prey only.

I have to catch it before it climbs a tree!

With his muscles stretching farther than they ever had before, Icepaw leaped, almost missing his prey. But his paw landed onto it's back, crushing its delicate bones. His heart was beating with relief, but the poor thing still struggled underneath him despite its injuries. Moved with pity, he bent down and quickly sunk his teeth into its neck, deep enough to kill and end its misery.

The bloody taste of his first fresh-kill made him beam with pride.

"I did it!" he exclaimed.

The exhilaration of his first hunt left him breathing hard and satisfied. A few paces away, Dewpaw watched him keenly but silently as their mentors rushed in to congratulate him.

Later, Icepaw and the rest of the patrol came back to camp. Icepaw didn't manage to catch more prey, but he still felt proud of himself since Dewpaw did not catch a squirrel like he did. Dewpaw, however, ended up catching a mouse upon their return by accidentally stepping on it.

Icepaw didn't know why, but he felt like he needed to compete with his brother to see who will one day be the better warrior, or possibly even someday leader. He knew he would never mean to hurt anyone, or accuse anyone of hurting him, but he still felt like he needed to be the *best*.

And for some reason, Dewpaw's drive and aspirations seemed to match his own.

Chapter Three

Edited ✔

It was sunhigh, and the heat beat down on Icepaw's hot flank. He was thirsty, but excited. Today he was on a border patrol with Ashtail, Fireshade, Dawnpaw and Swiftbreeze. Everyone was silent, so he remained silent as well, following the patrol until they made it out of the trees. Icepaw felt just like the time at the moor a few days ago when he was moss collecting: out in the open.

But Icepaw wasn't scared. He was excited and hoping for a battle. He kept that feeling to himself in case Ashtail should scold him.

Leaves rustled with a gentle breeze and birds flew overhead from tree to tree, making him jump every time. Icepaw was excited but he was also nervous. Dawnpaw dropped in beside Icepaw, her eyes still up ahead.

"There might be a fight," Dawnpaw whispered, making Icepaw jump again. "There's a hunting patrol somewhere nearby. Brightstar uses them as backup whenever Sparrowheart sends a patrol here." Icepaw knew Dawnpaw was referring to the fact that DarkClan warriors loved battle and had a reputation of attacking the other Clans, *especially* MoonClan, for what seemed like no reason.

Icepaw shook his head. "If there was a hunting patrol here then they should have gone somewhere else!"

"Exactly!" Dawnpaw meowed. She took a breath of air in and smelled the area. "And DarkClan warriors are vicious and travel in large groups. Sometimes when they come to gatherings, they have more warriors than any other Clan!"

Icepaw looked down to his paws. *I wonder if she is just trying to scare me?* he thought. Dawnpaw continued, "You can see for yourself one day."

"I know," Icepaw murmured, nodding. He didn't know what else to say. But his battle hunger didn't go away. It only got stronger as he knew this was going to be a challenge. Maybe Icepaw could try his two-days-worth of battle training on them. He knew he'd been working hard; he wanted to really fight.

The DarkClan scent washed into their noses, and immediately Swiftbreeze stopped, holding up her tail. Her patrol stopped behind her, and all of the cats crouched low, scanning the area. They looked out for another patrol.

Soft twigs broke and leaves crunched somewhere on the other side of the border and Icepaw's heart beat faster. A light ginger she-cat followed by a rusty-orange-colored apprentice and a few other warriors stopped at their side of the border, staring over with delight into Icepaw's Clan territory.

"Ah," the ginger she-cat sighed. "MoonClan. The biggest enemy. The Clan that is closest to our camp." She slowly looked around, and her eyes passed over the bush the MoonClan patrol hid in. "Hey, let's see if a patrol will come? They're always here at sunhigh."

The apprentice by her side squealed with excitement. "If there is a patrol, will there be a battle?" he asked, holding the same excitement that Icepaw held.

The ginger she-cat rested her tail on the apprentice's spine. "Perhaps, Flamepaw," she meowed. Icepaw stared mainly at the apprentice, Flamepaw. He saw how bouncy and young the apprentice looked, and at the same time, how battle hungry he was.

Icepaw knew Flamepaw was just like him. *We'd be great friends if we were Clanmates,* he thought.

A gray tabby ran up to the ginger she-cat with worry in his eyes. "But Sandstar!" he nervously meowed. "Flamepaw's too young. He might not survive in his first battle."

"Silence!" Sandstar hissed. "You are more lowly than Flamepaw! He should be treated with great respect." Flamepaw nodded curtly. "Now, Flamepaw, take the other apprentices over there and check

the borders until MoonClan comes. Oaktree, I assume you can handle two others and wait over to the other side?"

They're planning an attack! thought Icepaw with surprise. Were all the Clans like this? He knew MoonClan certainly wasn't.

"Can do, Sandstar," a brown tabby who must be Oaktree said. The warrior chose two cats and ran all the way to the other side until he was out of plain sight. Swiftbreeze turned to her patrol, and Icepaw looked up hopefully at the gray she-cat.

Swiftbreeze sighed, and peeked over once more to check Sandstar and two other cats sitting and waiting. Finally, she said, "We're outmatched and we won't win if they pull an attack on us."

Icepaw listened and watched her carefully. "Icepaw," she continued, resting her eyes at the young apprentice. "Run as fast as you can, unnoticed, back to camp. Get a patrol and bring them here. I don't want to risk bloodshed or death but we must be safe."

Icepaw's eyes widened with disbelief. "What?" he questioned with disbelief. "I wanted to fight! I thought I was gonna fight!"

Swiftbreeze shook her head. "You're the least experienced. You have to go back to camp." Icepaw sadly nodded, not wanting to start an argument with his Clanmate in the middle of a crisis. "And we have to mark our borders, so I can't take any chances of having our warriors attacked and injured."

Icepaw thought for a moment. "How will I travel with Sandstar looking straight in our direction?" he asked. Dawnpaw looked over to see Sandstar again, but the ginger DarkClan leader didn't spot her. "We'll be caught and her patrol gets to us."

Swiftbreeze sat and thought, and Ashtail's eyes eagerly lit up. "Climb!" he suggested. "Crawl to the nearest tree and climb the other side that's not facing Sandstar. Then, go tree by tree until you are far enough."

"Brilliant!" Fireshade meowed.

Swiftbreeze nodded an agreement, and Dawnpaw silently kept

watch. "If you can manage it," Swiftbreeze said, "Go and climb. I trust you."

Icepaw sighed and nodded. He turned and faced the nearest tree. Suddenly, softly called, "Go, she's not watching!" Almost immediately, Icepaw leaped forward, imagining he was running away from a battle.

He wasn't happy but he knew he had to do what his patrol leader instructed. Icepaw ran to the nearest tree and leaped up the side where it was facing away from Sandstar. She didn't notice, which made him sigh of relief as he made his was up the top of the oak tree.

"Wow," Icepaw breathed. He could see the sky and some treetops and his patrol still crouched at the bushes. Then, Icepaw turned away and leaped to a tree branch, hoping he would not miss. He sighed of relief as he clawed his way up the first branch.

He looked around once more, and leaped to the next branch, his prayers reaching all the way up to StarClan. *I can do this . . .*

As he leaped to the next tree, he looked back, and stiffened. Sandstar was looking up, almost right at him. Since he was covered by the foliage, he hoped that the DarkClan leader didn't really see him. Then, after a short yet long moment, their eyes met. Sandstar was looking right into his own eyes.

He could hear her devious voice. "Look!" she growled. "A MoonClan apprentice!" Immediately, Flamepaw ran up to Sandstar and spotted Icepaw. "There could be a patrol around! Quick, search!"

One of the DarkClan warriors let out a menacing hiss. "Come out, come out, MoonClan cats!"

Icepaw realized he was frozen with horror as he could see his own patrol about to stir out of the bush. Their plan had failed. There might be bloodshed. Icepaw looked down to Ashtail, who was staring back at him. Sandstar still did not find the patrol, but knew they soon would if he didn't hurry.

"The apprentice is going to get away!" a she-cat growled.

Sandstar laughed. "Let him. He'll bring the battle right to us!"

Icepaw dashed from branch to branch, fear rising up deep within his chest. Someone might die today and it would be his fault! Icepaw has never felt more scared. Not even his dream felt as scary!

The DarkClan warriors stood, watching and smirking at him, but they didn't chase him like he expected. Icepaw then knew he still had a chance to make it back in time to camp to warn Brightstar and save his patrol. When he was far enough from the DarkClan territory, Icepaw leaped off of the tree branch and began pounding on the forest floor, away from the danger. Farther from death.

The camp was coming into view, and he leaped in the prickly entrance, tumbling over. All the cats who weren't on patrol ran up to Icepaw, worry in their eyes.

Brightstar leaped off her high den. "What's wrong, Icepaw?" she asked, knowing that he was one of the cats who went on a patrol to DarkClan. "Where are the others?"

Icepaw slowly got up. "They're okay, but a large DarkClan patrol is waiting at the borders to ambush us! We're outnumbered. If they find our patrol . . . there will be a lot of bloodshed!"

Brightstar growled. "And where is the hunting patrol?"

Icepaw froze. He remembered what Dawnpaw said. "I don't know, we didn't see them. The only cats there are the MoonClan and the DarkClan border patrols."

Brightstar looked up to the clouds, sighing. "I hoped that there would be no battles," she murmured. "But Sandstar was always blood-thirsty." Icepaw felt bad for hoping for a battle. His ears pressed back in silent embarrassment. All of the cats nervously crowded Icepaw and Brightstar. Then, the leader ordered, "Sparrowheart! Take three warriors with you and get to the border as fast as possible!"

"On it!" he called. He turned and scanned the area. "Skypelt, come.

Bluewing, and . . . Nightrose!"

The dark gray she-cat and black she-cat dashed to the entrance of camp. Skypelt and Sparrowheart were already waiting there. "Let's go," Sparrowheart called to Icepaw. The gray apprentice's eyes widened.

"Coming, Sparrowheart," he said. *This will be something to tell Dewpaw!*

They dashed across forest floor , and this time since Icepaw wasn't as scared, he ran up besides his father with newfound confidence. Sparrowheart chose him to fight! Icepaw felt finally higher than Dewpaw, who always seemed to be a step ahead.

Soon, they were near the border, and the sounds of hissing rose in Icepaw's ears. He could see his patrol along with more MoonClan warriors, probably from the hunting patrol. One of those cats stood out due to his bright white pelt. It was Dewpaw! Icepaw's heart sank as he remembered that Dewpaw was one of those among the hunting patrol.

There goes something exciting to tell him.

Dawnpaw stood right beside Dewpaw, and Mousetail and Shadowheart were there as well. Sandstar stood beside her apprentice, hissing and growling and threatening the MoonClan cats. Her large patrol stood behind her, following what she was doing.

Sparrowheart growled with anger and broke into the chain of MoonClan warriors who were just about to fight. "Enough!" yowled Sparrowheart. "Now, what is going on here?"

Every warrior stopped their obnoxious yowling and hissing. Sparrowheart sighed and continued, "What is the meaning of this? Why is there more *quarreling?"*

"Sparrowheart!" Sandstar meowed angrily. "Stop questioning things! It's not our fault that your cats crossed our borders!"

Icepaw's fur began to prickle, and he leaped up. "That's a lie!" he

blurted out. "You filthy DarkClan warriors wanted to ambush our patrol!" Icepaw found himself growling. He stood right besides Dawnpaw and Dewpaw, who looked surprised.

Sandstar let out a purr. "Oh, look, it's the one who *ran off!* The apprentice too scared to fight, the one who ran off in the trees!"

Icepaw was growling, but felt embarrassed. Heat rose to his ear-tips.

"Stop it!" Ashtail ordered. "She's only trying to mock you. She's trying to start a fight!"

"Flamepaw, go! Now's you're chance to show me what I have taught you," she said. "Get the gray apprentice!" She flicked her tail at Icepaw, and he froze. So did Flamepaw. They both looked at each other, and Icepaw looked back at his companions, who were also doing nothing.

After the moment of hesitation, the rusty-orange apprentice finally spoke.

"Yes, Sandstar!" Flamepaw leaped up with his claws outstretched. At the same moment, though, one of the oak trees began to sway in the direction of all the quarreling cats.

Oh no! Icepaw thought, running up and grabbing Flamepaw with his claws. He pulled the apprentice out of the way just in time before the oak tree crashed in between the two Clans.

Sandstar stood on the other side with horror, and Flamepaw's eyes were squeezed shut as Icepaw held him. Every warrior was in shock.

"A sign . . ." Shadowheart murmured, his ears flattened and his eyes wide.

Just as Shadowheart spoke, Swiftbreeze rose her voice. "A sign from StarClan!" she called. "StarClan says that there will be no bloodshed today!"

Yowls of agreement rose from MoonClan. Then, Sparrowheart

leaped up on the oak that has just fallen, enough to see the DarkClan patrol. "Go home," he said. "Swiftbreeze is right. StarClan doesn't approve of this."

Sandstar stood there growling. "Fine, MoonClan. You'll get away this time, but watch your backs!" she spat. "Flamepaw, come!"

Icepaw got off of the rusty orange apprentice, and Flamepaw stood up, dipping his head to Icepaw. "Thank you," he said, still shaking. He leaned closer and whispered, "Meet me here again. Moonhigh."

Confused, Icepaw nodded, and Flamepaw began to run away. Why would a DarkClan cat want to talk to an apprentice like him? Icepaw shook himself to be rid of any confusion, and began to walk away with his Clanmates.

Dewpaw trotted over to him, his eyes wide with excitement. "This was way more intense than the first quarrel with DarkClan!" he meowed with excitement. "These cats were more hostile. Especially Sandstar!"

Icepaw nodded, and Dawnpaw raced up to his other side. "I was almost about to leap in there and tear Flamepaw off of you, too!"

"I would of handled it," Icepaw murmured.

Dawnpaw nodded, smiling. She and Dewpaw began to talk on either side of Icepaw, but he ignored it, thinking to himself. *The only fight I cowered away from was with that Twilight Warrior—but I know I won't be as scared as I was then. Right?*

After all, he wasn't a kit anymore. Each day he was an apprentice, he felt braver and fiercer. So why wasn't he so sure of his bravery now?

Time passed, and the two patrols finally made it to camp. Some of the hunters carried prey. Some looked disappointed, probably because DarkClan cats stole their food. Icepaw wondered if StreamClan, CloudClan and MarshClan have been having problems with DarkClan as well.

Out of the corner of the camp, Featherbreeze came running up to

her mate and kits. Dewpaw and Sparrowheart waited with Icepaw until Featherbreeze reached them, panting. She nuzzled Sparrowheart first.

"What happened?" she asked worriedly. "I heard that there was another attack from DarkClan!"

Sparrowheart sighed. "We almost got attacked. Only then Icepaw came in time to stop it," Sparrowheart meowed, looking proudly down at his son.

Icepaw nodded, embarrassed.

"But the hunting patrol prey got stolen," Dewpaw meowed. "I caught the biggest squirrel ever! It's a shame that I couldn't contribute it to the Clan."

Icepaw didn't feel jealous, even though he figured Dewpaw was probably lying about the squirrel to get to Icepaw. He was still confused about Flamepaw, and better yet, captured by the idea that he was not as brave as he thought he was.

Sparrowheart growled, and Icepaw looked up at his father. "I'm going to go have a word to Brightstar about what to tell those filthy DarkClan cats at the next gathering," he said, beginning to walk away. He turned and added, "Getting attacked and having prey stolen is what hungry low-life rogues would do!"

Icepaw got a sudden bolt of excitement in his chest. He turned to Featherbreeze and asked, "Speaking of gatherings, when will the next one be?" He thought about if he could go to his first gathering after just being made an apprentice a few days ago.

Featherbreeeze took a moment before responding, thinking herself. "It's next quarter-moon!" she announced, and Icepaw felt Dewpaw's excitement right over his own. "You both might get to come along."

"Yes!" Icepaw cheered. Featherbreeze nodded, dismissing herself. *In just a quarter-moon, I might see all of the warrior Clans and leaders!*

* * *

The day went by, and it was almost moonhigh. It was also Icepaw's third time sleeping in the apprentice den, but he stayed awake all night, remembering his promise to go and meet Flamepaw where they had almost fought. Icepaw waited for all the apprentices to stop stirring before he crept out of his nest.

He stretched as soon as he exited the den, and thanked StarClan that the apprentices slept close by the entrance of the camp. He didn't have to slip past the warriors den or leader's rock and risk getting spotted by a warrior. As he reached the entrance, he poked his head through and spotted both Ashtail and Swiftbreeze talking to one another in hushed whispers, their backs turned to him. Icepaw was careful not to step on any leaves or twigs as he crept away, and when he knew he was far enough he made a run for it.

Icepaw hoped Flamepaw would be waiting for him, as he wanted to meet another Clan cat. Even though he knew there was a possibility that Flamepaw could be tricking him, he had a good feeling about the DarkClan apprentice.

He was hesitant to fight me, Icepaw thought as he made his way to the DarkClan border. *There must be some good DarkClan cats, right?*

Reassuring himself, he followed the smell of Swiftbreeze's border patrol to reach his destination. It was a bit hard navigating during the nighttime, but his eyesight was good, especially under the luminescent light.

It didn't take him a long time to travel. He made it just in time to see the rusty ginger tom sitting on the fallen oak. He licked his paw and drew it over his ear, sitting patiently underneath the moonlight.

Icepaw emerged from his side of the border and stood at the base of the oak and cleared his throat. Flamepaw spotted him and leaped down, graceful as a MoonClan cat.

He dipped his head. "Greetings."

Icepaw didn't think that DarkClan cats could feel so polite. "Uh . . . hello," Icepaw meowed, not knowing what to say. "Why---why did

you ask me to come?"

Flamepaw smiled. "I just wanted to thank you in advance, Icepaw." He paused, as if in deep thought about something. "And I wanted to ask you . . . . Why did you pull me out of the way in the first place? Out of the way from the falling tree, I mean. I-I thought MoonClan and DarkClan hated each other, that they wanted each other to die . . ."

Icepaw stared at him, puzzled. Wouldn't just any warrior save another Clan cat?

"I don't want anyone to die," Icepaw murmured, feeling awkward. "Nobody I know thinks so, either. Besides, the Warrior Code says to show the other Clans mercy, so we shouldn't kill in battle."

Flamepaw's eyes widened. "I've never heard that addition in the code," he admitted. "Sandstar doesn't show anyone mercy. But I do know we all have to respect her—word of leader is law!"

Icepaw thought it was strange that Flamepaw didn't know that part of the code, but perhaps he had just forgotten it when his mentor was teaching it to him. "I think I can understand," he said to the DarkClan apprentice. It felt strange talking to the enemy. "So does that mean you don't like Sandstar?"

Flamepaw shook his head. "She's an amazing leader and mentor," he meowed. "Just different. That's all."

Different, Icepaw thought. *Different how?*

He could hear the birds in the trees stirring, and he jumped with surprise. Looking up at the sky, the stars of Silverpelt seemed less prominent than it had during moonhigh. *I hadn't realized how much time had passed!*

"It'll be dawn soon," he murmured, his eyes returning on the orange warrior. "The stars are gone. I-I have to go. But it was nice to talk to you, Flamepaw, without the aggressions and all . . ."

"I know what you mean," the other apprentice murmured.

Icepaw backed up onto his own territory, observing Flamepaw with caution and curiosity at the same time. "Well, I'll see you around. I have to get back to MoonClan before they notice I'm gone."

"I have to get back, too," Flamepaw said as he began to back away into his own territory. "I hope to see you at our next gathering."

"Me too, Flamepaw," he said. Dipping his head one final time, Icepaw whirled around and dashed into the undergrowth, heading back to MoonClan in fear that some cat had realized he was gone. He didn't look back, but he felt Flamepaw's gaze travel his on back.

Questions still soared in Icepaw's mind about the kind DarkClan apprentice. *Did they just forget to teach Flamepaw that part of the Code? Or does Sandstar deliberately exclude it?*

Maybe he should tell his Clan. Well, maybe not. Icepaw thought that Flamepaw entrusted him with secret information, and maybe he should keep his mouth silent.

After all, beyond all the fighting between the two Clans, the apprentices took a liking to each other.

Chapter Four

Edited ✔

Icepaw followed the hunting patrol to the CloudClan borders, far away from DarkClan. The blazing sun beat down on his gray pelt and he stopped, feeling hot and thirsty. Today, Sagepelt was leading the patrol, and Ashtail remained in camp for a rest since he was tired. Dewpaw and his mentor remained in camp as well, having to do apprentice duties.

Icepaw looked around, since it was his first time being in the territory nearest to the moors. He wondered how CloudClan could possibly stand the sun, with no shady areas to rest in. Skypelt, the other tom in the patrol, looked up to the sky, his eyes clouded with thought.

Icepaw stared at Skypelt. He felt that Skypelt was thinking about Ripplefur, since she was going to give birth to her first litter soon. Sometimes the first kitting never went well. Icepaw trotted up to the young warrior.

"Are you okay, Skypelt?" he asked with worry in his tone.

Skypelt looked down to Icepaw with surprise. "Oh, yeah," he said, his voice low. "Why wouldn't I be?" He gave Icepaw a reassuring look.

"Are you sure?" Icepaw asked again. Sagepelt stopped at her tracks and turned to the two toms.

Sagepelt sighed. "He's afraid that when Ripplefur's kitting is done, Sandstar will order her warriors to steal the kits," she meowed. "That happened to you once, and Volepaw and his sisters." Icepaw nodded, understanding now. "Only low-lives steal kits, anyway. We'll be able to defend ourselves."

"Oh," Icepaw said, knowing mainly that the reassuring was for

Skypelt. The white tom nodded gratefully, and then the patrol began to walk again. Now silence engulfed them as they padded through the trees. The smell of the moor was becoming stronger.

Sagepelt took in a deep breath and looked around the area. "We're here," she said, turning to Skypelt and Icepaw. "Now, each of you go your own ways, but not too far. We only want to catch prey. Meet back here when you're satisfied. Try to remember what Ashtail has taught you so far, Icepaw."

"Got it!" Icepaw meowed, beginning to walk away. Skypelt and Sagepelt were going in opposite directions, too. When Icepaw thought he was far enough, he sniffed the air to see any signs of prey, only to find nothing.

He went in a different direction, checking there too, but still found no scents fresh enough to pursue. Finally, Icepaw did find something. He began to scent a rabbit, and since the wind blew in his direction, he knew that the prey wouldn't scent him.

My first rabbit! Icepaw thought eagerly. *The Clan would be proud.*

He began to creep forward into a clump of grass, and he spotted the brown rabbit hopping around the trees. Icepaw took a deep breath, and began to go forward. He was determined to catch the rabbit, since it will make his Clan very satisfied.

Icepaw's belly was low to the ground, and he came closer, excitement rippling through his body. Almost immediately, he leaped and pounced on it. The rabbit squealed in surprise and scratched Icepaw's underbelly, though he already had his jaws deep in it's throat. As Icepaw let go happily, a new feeling overcame Icepaw. It was pain.

He groaned, and his paw clenched at his stomach. The rabbit had hurt him badly, and his belly stung. "Ow!" he growled.

A sigh sounded from the other side of the MoonClan border, and he realized it was a CloudClan cat. "You know, tree cats really shouldn't hunt rabbits," he said. "You all should leave it to the moor cats. You know nothing about this."

Icepaw looked up, and saw a tom with a brown dirt-covered pelt, and he had blazing amber eyes that bore deeply into Icepaw. "Who are you?" Icepaw demanded, still clenching at his belly.

"I'm Runningshade," the CloudClan warrior replied, walking over the border. This made Icepaw freeze. "And you look like you need help. Want me to get you back to your camp?"

Icepaw stared blankly at Runningshade. Even from the warrior's rude remark, CloudClan cats must be nice in their own way. "N-no," Icepaw said. "No. I can make it on my own." He slowly let down his paw, revealing three bleeding scratches on his belly. He didn't want to look weak when he arrived at his Clan.

Icepaw picked up his rabbit and turned, limping away. With every pawstep, it hurt. "Okay, then," Runningshade said, walking back over to CloudClan. "Bye."

Then, when Icepaw turned, Runningshade was gone. *The Clan cats are always coming and going,* Icepaw thought, remembering the quarrel with DarkClan. He also remembered at the other night when he spoke with Flamepaw, who revealed that DarkClan didn't learn the whole warrior code.

Icepaw put that in the back of his mind, limping over to the spot he was suppose to meet Skypelt and Sagepelt. He collapsed with pain, and let the brown rabbit drop as well. Almost immediately, Sagepelt bursted through the trees.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "I smell blood." She had a mouse in her jaws, and she looked over at Icepaw, who lay in the forest floor.

Icepaw looked up and showed her his wounds. "The rabbit scratched me when I caught it. It wouldn't stop thrashing around."

Sagepelt sighed, looking down at the wound. "Well, its something only the medicine cat can see," she murmured, licking the wound so that she could clean the blood off. Icepaw winced. It hurt. "Skypelt should be coming. Then we can go."

Icepaw sighed. He felt embarrassed for some reason for getting the

scratches on his stomach in the first place. The white-furred warrior Skypelt was soon back in the clearing, holding a vole and a pigeon. He saw Icepaw's wound.

"Are you okay?" Skypelt asked with worry.

Icepaw nodded. "It's not bad," he said. "Just stings."

Skypelt grabbed Icepaw's scruff, hauling him up. "Let's get to camp then," Skypelt said. When Icepaw was standing, Skypelt let him lean on his shoulder. "Sagepelt, can you get the prey?"

"Sure," Sagepelt said, picking up the rabbit first.

Icepaw shook his head. "No, I want to carry the rabbit," he meowed, pointing to the limp brown creature with his tail. "It was my first rabbit. I want to present it to MoonClan myself."

Sagepelt nodded, giving it over. "Sure thing," she said, getting her prey as well as Skypelts'. They began making their way back to MoonClan.

Shortly, they returned to the camp, where almost nobody was there. The warriors were mostly on patrols, and the apprentices were doing their duties, including Sweetpaw, the medicine cat apprentice. At least Vinetail was there.

He put his rabbit in the center of the camp in the fresh kill pile, and then Sagepelt helped him over to Vinetail's den. Icepaw was relieved when he entered the den, and the bitter herb scents made him feel better already.

Vinetail looked down to Icepaw, examining his stomach. "What happened?" the brown medicine tom asked. "Prey?"

"Rabbit," Icepaw said specifically. Vinetail ran his paw over the three scratches, making Icepaw wince.

"It's not bad, don't worry," Vinetail reassured him, cleaning his wounds with a few leaves. "This is to make sure an infection won't happen. And take this-" Vinetail took two poppy seeds "—it'll make the pain better."

Icepaw obeyed and took the poppy seeds, relieved. The medicine cat was making him feel better already. Then, Vinetail began to clean the wound. This left a silence between the two toms as Vinetail worked. Finally, he cracked the silence.

"I saw you the other night," Vinetail murmured quietly, only so that Icepaw could hear. "You were at the DarkClan border talking to Flamepaw." There was no disappointment or sadness in his eyes. Only interest.

His eyes widened. *He knows!* Icepaw thought nervously. He shifted uncomfortably, and Vinetail continued, "What were you two talking about? DarkClan is never so friendly."

Icepaw hesitated before answering. He didn't want to tell Vinetail what Flamepaw has told him, because he didn't want to betray his new friend. "I saved him from being crushed from an oak tree," Icepaw meowed, careful to what he says. "Flamepaw wanted to thank me in advance. That's all."

Vinetail nodded. "And I saw that Sandstar wanted the two of you to fight while I was herb collecting," he said, still tending to Icepaw's wounds. "Didn't you think it was an ambush so that Flamepaw could finish what he has started?"

Icepaw looked up and into Vinetail's amber eyes. "Err, no. I didn't think that at all. When the Clans were quarreling Flamepaw hesitated before charging at me. I saw that he didn't want to fight, but he had to obey his leader."

Vinetail nodded once more and finished placing the cobweb onto his chest. "Okay, done," the medicine cat said. "Rest for the day and at dawn tomorrow you'll feel no pain at all."

Icepaw sighed of relief when Vinetail left the den. Icepaw remained there, watching him go. *Is that all Vinetail has to say?* he thought. Light filtered through the entrance of the medicine cave, and the fresh scent of Sweetpaw was made out. Vinetail greeted her warmly as she carried bundles of herbs and plants, and Volepaw followed, walking over to the medicine den.

None of them greeted him, since their mouths were too full of the herbs. Finally, Volepaw set his catmint by in a bundle of leaves, and Sweetpaw put her herbs down as well.

Volepaw turned to Icepaw and greeted him.

"Hi, Volepaw," Icepaw said in acknowledgement. Sweetpaw gave him her greetings as well and they both left the den.

Vinetail sighed. "Today, everyone's busy," he murmured. Icepaw understood that. Kits were coming to MoonClan and soon leaf-fall would begin, forming leaf-bare, the time of hunger.

"Well," Icepaw said, "everyone will rest when they get their chance."

Vinetail nodded. "Hopefully."

Icepaw shifted to get more comfortable, and saw as Dewpaw changed the elder's bedding in the medicine den. Sweetpaw and Volepaw were gone again with Adderclaw, and every other cat was on a patrol. Icepaw felt lonely. He was bored and wanted to continue his hunt.

Why do rabbits have to be so dangerous to catch? Icepaw thought with frustration. He thought that all prey was just like catching a mouse —careful and easy. He sighed, guessing he was wrong. Icepaw laid his head down in his temporary moss bedding, and decided to use this time to rest. He was tired for the past few days, and he thought this was the perfect moment.

Icepaw closed his eyes and drifted off into a sleep.

When his eyes opened again, Vinetail stood over him. He slowly got up, and saw his stomach scratches, remembering what happened. He was relieved that it didn't hurt as much.

He looked around, and the sun was still in the sky, though dusk was approaching. He looked at Vinetail once more. "What happened?" Icepaw slowly asked.

"You were just asleep," Vinetail said. "Why do you ask?"

Icepaw shook his head. "Was I really asleep?"

Vinetail nodded. "Yes, you were asleep for quite a while," he meowed. "You must want to go to your den now." He walked out of the front entrance of the den, where he then saw Dawnpaw waiting over there. She waved her tail. "Go ahead, you're friends are waiting."

"Thank you, Vinetail," Icepaw meowed as he began to walk out of the den. He didn't look back where Sweetpaw orginized herbs, and Dewpaw and Volepaw talked and laughed in their nests. Dawnpaw was relaxing.

"Hello, Icepaw," she mewed once he reached her.

"Hi," Icepaw said back. "What are you doing?"

Dawnpaw looked at him with surprise. "Nothing, really. I'm just thinking," she said. "About Ripplefur. She's my sister. I'm worried about her."

Icepaw understood. He knew he was competitive with Dewpaw but he loved his brother very much. "She's my friend. I'm worried about her, too. And Skypelt. He's as worried than anyone."

Dawnpaw nodded, and turned, beginning to walk into the apprentice's den. He stared back at her as she curled up in her nest to sleep, and Icepaw looked over at the nursery. Ripplefur was asleep as well, with his mother Featherbreeze right by her side for comfort. She was very, very close to kitting.

He sighed, walking into the apprentice den as well. He curled in his nest, not wanting to fall asleep. He kept his gaze on poor Ripplefur, thinking about her future and kits.

Chapter Five

Edited ✔

"Ashtail?" Icepaw asked his mentor. It's been three days since he has been attacked by the rabbit, and he was fully healed. "Are we going to do more battle training today?"

Ashtail looked down with warm eyes on his apprentice and shook his head. "Afraid not," he replied. "It's your turn to do apprentice duties. You're going out with Vinetail today." He pointed to the large brown tom with his tail. "He asked for permission with me first, of course."

Icepaw sighed and nodded. "Okay. Bye, Ashtail."

He began to walk away. The day was damp and warm, because of the other day's rain showers. Almost the whole Clan stayed at camp because they didn't want to get wet, and most of the cats didn't eat. Today, almost everyone was out catching prey.

Vinetail was washing his pelt in his den, clearly waiting for Icepaw to come. Sweetpaw has gone battle to do battle training so she can learn to defend herself, so Vinetail was alone. Icepaw dipped his head to the older cat as he walked in.

"Hi, Vinetail," Icepaw meowed. "I heard I was going out with you today. Who with?"

Vinetail smiled. "It's just you and me," he said.

Icepaw looked at him with surprise. "But the rule says no less than three cats at a patrol!" he protested. "A DarkClan warrior can always attack us!"

Vinetail sighed but still held his smile. "Then if I get attacked—" he looked up to the pale sky " —StarClan will surely disapprove. It's against the warrior code *and* the medicine cat code for a medicine

cat to be attacked. Besides, we won't do anything wrong."

Icepaw understood. He began to remember the warrior code and what Flamepaw said about it. He shook his head, trying to forget.

"Are you okay?" Vinetail asked.

"Yeah," Icepaw mewed.

Vinetail nodded, beginning to lead the apprentice out of his den and out of the camp entrance. The camp looked deserted, except for the resting warriors and the expecting queen. Icepaw smiled as he saw Ripplefur, his old friend when he was a kit. She was a very young warrior and had everyone worried about her kitting.

Vinetail kept leading, and he stopped when they were out in the forest. Icepaw stared at the medicine cat as he opened his jaws, tasting the scent of the forest. "Okay," Vinetail explained. "We're going to go to the only place you haven't been in our territory. We're going to the herb patch, far from the other territories. It's the safest place where a cat could be, but its closest to the Twoleg territory."

Icepaw understood. "We're going to collect herbs?" he asked and Vinetail nodded. He began to walk upwind in the path to MarshClan, with Icepaw trotting right behind him. No cat talked, except for the distant chatter of birds and the mice climbing all around the forest trees and bushes. As usual, the forest was loud, noisy and beautiful.

The leaves rippled in the gentle breeze overhead, making Icepaw calmly sigh. He never wanted leaf-bare to come. He lifted his head up and looked to the sky. The sun shone warmly down onto his face. Icepaw loved the sun, for its warm rays were comforting.

Vinetail peered behind his back to see Icepaw drowning the sun's warmth in his fur. "Come on," he meowed. "We're almost to the herb patch."

Icepaw nodded. "Coming!" he called, trotting up to get to Vinetail's side. Icepaw looked around and has just noticed they weren't going

near MarshClan at all. The trees were beginning to look different, and there were fewer and fewer plants and bushes.

Vinetail slowly walked, going slower as well, slinking to the ground. Icepaw got down as well, not knowing what to do. The two toms now hid in the undergrowth, looking over the tall grass. "What's over there?" Icepaw asked in a hushed tone.

"Kittypets," Vinetail whispered, motioning to two kittypets talking and sitting in MoonClan territory. "Twolegs might not know when to stay off our borders, but their kittypets know very well. Some of them can be vicious sometimes."

Icepaw stared at the two plump cats. *But even the warriors say that they are nothing but soft furballs!* he thought.

"Are we going to attack?" Icepaw asked.

Vinetail sighed. "It's the warrior's job to protect our borders, but this is my Clan, too." He got up, but the to kittypets still didn't notice him. "Come on Icepaw. Kittypets believe we turn into badgers when it comes to fighting!"

Icepaw's whiskers twitched, and the two toms began to stalk over to the trespassers. Finally, the gray tabby one wearing a red collar around his neck looked up and over at Vinetail and Icepaw. He looked friendly over and waved his tail, and the ginger one with the blue collar looked over as well.

"Hello!" the gray one meowed. "I'm Cookie and that's my friend, Daisy. We just got into this neighborhood, but I've never seen you around!"

Daisy smiled. "Hello."

Vinetail sighed, and Icepaw was very confused. He didn't know why they were being so friendly or didn't know what a 'neighborhood' even was. Their words were strange to his ears, but he remained by Vinetail, not knowing how to deal with them at all.

"Look," Vinetail said in a hostile tone. "If you're new in the Twolegplace, then I'll give you a warning. The forest is *ours.* Cats

like you are not allowed in places like this. You hunt prey for fun, but we do it for food to survive. We don't need a bunch of kittypets scaring off our food."

Cookie's friendly smile turned into surprise. He stared at Icepaw and Vinetail with disbelief. "B-but, the forest doesn't belong to *you*," he protested. "We like it here very much!"

"Tough luck for you," Vinetail spat. "Leave, or we're going to have to make you."

Icepaw looked over at Daisy, whose eyes were full of fear. Cookie's eyes were challenging.

"Then bring it!" he hissed, leaping up. Icepaw stared at Daisy, who smelled of milk, and her belly was plumper than Cookie's.

"No!" Icepaw meowed, stopping Vinetail. "You shouldn't hurt her. She looks like she's going to have kits. It just makes me feel bad!"

Cookie stared at Icepaw, narrowing his eyes. "That's because she is."

Icepaw met his gaze, unintimidated. "You're too soft for this forest, your place is in your safe Twoleg dens. We won't hurt your friend but we will surely hurt you." He stared up intensely at Cookie. "Leave. We don't want to solve this in battle."

Cookie pulled back his ears, snarling. "Fine." He turned and began to stalk off. Daisy dipped her head and raced after Cookie. Icepaw sighed of relief. He didn't want to hurt the expecting she-cat. He looked over at Vinetail, who nodded approvingly.

"You're very humble," Vinetail commented. "Now that's taken care of, let's keep going to the herb patch. It's just over there."

Icepaw nodded. They began to walk back into the forest, walking just on the edge of the trees. He shivered as one thought came to mind. *Would Vinetail really attack an expecting she-cat? What about any of my Clanmates?*

This type of thought scared him. He looked down at his paws, and his tail dropped down as he walked. He felt bad about threatening

to attack such innocent cats. He just didn't know why, but he knew it was wrong. Maybe it was because he was still too soft.

I'm nothing close to being a warrior yet! he thought with disappointment.

The scent of fresh leaves was coming into Icepaw's throat, and Vinetail stopped ahead of him. "We're here," he reported.

Icepaw looked up, and saw a large number of herb patches in a clearing, with a stream running around it. The mud and soil looked rich and moist, and so did the plants. He padded up close so that his paws nearly touched the stream. "It's beautiful."

The colors expanded into varieties of different types and flowers. "Yes," Vinetail agreement. "Beautiful is the word every cat describes the herbs. Not only are their looks appealing, but they provide comfort for the sick and treatment for the broken. Every herb has its individual beauty."

Icepaw nodded and walked up closer so his paws touched the lake. "Which ones do we collect? How will we get across?"

Vinetail climbed down to the stream. "We wade," he replied. "It's very shallow---a little water won't hurt us." Icepaw nodded and went down after Vinetail. He froze as he first touched the water. Even though some cats in his Clan apparently learned to swim, he didn't like getting his fur wet.

He was slowly walking across until he jumped to the other side, fur bristling. He felt something dart past his paws in the water. "Wh-what was that?" Icepaw gasped.

Vinetail chuckled and climbed out of the stream. "Tiny fish live here and dwell off the soil," he said. "I really don't mind them being here." He looked down at the stream where groups of the tiny fish sped around, barely able to be seen.

"I-*I'm* not okay with them!" he admitted. "They feel creepy, so tiny they're not worth eating!"

Vinetail sighed. "They probably think you feel creepy and big, too."

His whiskers twitched, followed by a small *mrrow* of laughter.

Icepaw ignored his comment and turned to the herb patch. "Anyway, which herbs to we collect?"

Vinetail poked his nose through bundles of leaves. "I want you to find the ones that look like this," he meowed as he pulled up a flower by the root. Its petals were blue and was small and star-shaped. "It's borage to help the queens with milk and it brings down fevers."

Icepaw nodded. "Are you training me to become a medicine cat?" he said sarcastically as he poked his nose through the leaves and flowers.

Vinetail chuckled. "No, I'm not."

Icepaw nodded. "Good. I very much want to become a warrior." He saw the blue flower and pulled it out by its root just as Vinetail has done.

"Sure you do," Vinetail meowed truthfully as he picked up another flower. The two cats kept up the process, finding and piling up the borage. When Vinetail was satisfied with his plants, he stopped and looked over to Icepaw.

"Now, this is enough," Vinetail meowed to Icepaw. "Let's get back to the Clan. Brightstar's announcing her cats that are going to the Gathering soon. You won't want to miss it."

"No," Icepaw agreed, picking up all of the borage leaves he has collected. Then, with Vinetail in the lead, the two were off.

Soon, Icepaw and Vinetail returned to camp. The sun was down, and the moon was rising. Icepaw has just finished putting away the borage leaves he was holding and then Brightstar's loud and powerful voice called over the Clan.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" Brightstar announced. All of the cats were already there. Icepaw scuffled through his Clanmates to get to the front to sit by his brother, Dewpaw. "I have chosen the warriors

and apprentices who will be attending tonight's gathering!"

Icepaw looked up hopefully. "I want Sparrowheart, Crowflight, Swiftbreeze, Skypelt, Fireshade and Dawnpaw, Ashtail and Icepaw, Mousetail and Dewpaw, Grayfur, Featherbreeze, Sharpfang, Stonetooth and Vinetail are to attend," Brightstar had finally said. Icepaw almost jumped when he heard his name. "I expect these cats to eat and rest before we travel! Those who stay behind will watch over the camp carefully."

Murmurs swept through the crowd. Some were disappointed, some excited and others were of approval. Icepaw excitedly looked over at Dewpaw.

"You heard?" he asked. "We get to go to the gathering!"

Dewpaw nodded. "Yeah, and then we can meet the other cats from the other Clans! The only Clan leader I've met was Sandstar. . . and she was a bit crazy. I hope to see *everyone*!"

Icepaw sighed. Dewpaw was right but he was afraid that the other leaders would be just like the crazed cat who wanted him to fight with the DarkClan apprentice, Flamepaw.

"I just can't believe we're going," he sighed.

Dewpaw nodded with agreement, and a shape formed out of the corner of the apprentice's eyes. Dawnpaw trotted up to the two, with Ripplefur following. The two were sisters although born from different litters, and of course, were very close.

Ripplefur smiled at Icepaw. "Congratulations on getting to go to the gathering," she purred, nuzzling both of the apprentices.

"Congratulations!" Dawnpaw added.

Dewpaw nodded. "Thank you. I'm just so excited that I can go. . . it's such a different feeling than being confined into camp. The open forest is *way* better." His tail swept happily and gently from side to side in slow strokes.

"I can't wait to go!" Icepaw meowed, and so did Dawnpaw. They

both said it at almost the same time, which made them laugh.

"Well haven't you been to a gathering before?" Icepaw asked. Why would she be excited if she already knew what it was like?

Dawnpaw nodded. "I have, twice," she replied. "But I just like to go so much, naturally." Her golden-like fur rippled through the darkening sky's soft breeze. "It's a long journey. We must rest."

"I've heard," Icepaw said. She turned and began to walk away towards the apprentice's den. Dewpaw followed Icepaw while he followed the older apprentice. He just couldn't wait until he awoken again. Because at that time, it'll be time to leave for the gathering.

He curled up in his moss nest and tucked the loose feathers close to his cold underbelly. Even though it was newleaf, he loved the warmth so much, especially on a chilly or windy day like tonight. Icepaw rested his head on his paws after lying down more comfortably, and closed his eyes, drifting off into a good sleep.

Icepaw's eyes opened once more. His heart was beating, fast. He was nervous.

But from what? *Another dream*?

Icepaw began to walk away from wherever he was just standing. He did not know. He didn't even have a single idea of where he was. The sun was up, he could tell, because the sky was a dark color but with a shade of morning blue.

The sun must be covered by clouds because no direct shining light was hitting the land. The pine trees stood up very tall, very proud, refusing to bend down like the weeds to the rough winds that were blowing. Because of the stubbornness, twigs and sticks cracked and broke, and flew off of the pine trees.

Icepaw made sure he was careful. With every step taken, he kept a close watch on his own back and head, looking up every so often. *Where am I*? Icepaw thought, looking around. *What a dangerous place!*

The MoonClan apprentice's amber eyes darted from side to side as

he tried to make up from where he was. *Let's see. Marshy grounds, swamps, and pine trees. How about DarkClan territory?*

"You're not on DarkClan, you little kit," a deep voice said behind him. Icepaw quickly turned, his head pounding now, and saw the same eyes he'd seen the day of the Twilight Warrior. He smirked. "So you remember me. We do not die as easily as those StarClan cats."

Icepaw shrunk, but his fur bristled. A chill ran through his fur, but inside, his blood was hot and pumped through his body thickly. "Why am I here again?"

Icepaw didn't want to be confident that the cat who saved him the other day would come back. If anything were to attack him, he would have to defend himself. "The cats of StarClan can't always help you," quoted Brightstar many times. This was a perfect time to heed the wise leader's advice: "Sometimes it's just up to us."

"Some cat wanted you here. That's the only way in." The cat smirked, showing his white, sharp teeth. Even his claws were unsheathed, and they were stained with blood. His eyes flashed with an emotion Icepaw could not understand.

If that was true, Icepaw wondered why he was summoned. Who would do that? He didn't really know any dead cats, despite having ancestors who passed on to StarClan.

The Twilight warrior sighed. "Anyways, I heard you were apprenticed, too, and you're going to a gathering with Dawnpaw and Dewpaw and all those other warriors. I saw Brightstar choosing her cats—"

"How do you know about that?" snarled Icepaw, cutting the warrior off. The Twilight Warrior's muscles and broad shoulders were tense and his eyes were filling with a new cloud of emotion. It was anger.

The warrior's claws flexed and his tail flicked back and forth. "I can look through your memories," he said. "Like all the other gifted, powerful and special cats in my Clan. It's pretty cool, right, to have such a Clan with such a group of cats?"

"I don't care about powers. . . physically or mentally. . ." Icepaw murmured. Then, a sudden and yet painful hiss reached his ears.

"Do not go to the gathering," said a voice somewhat like the Twilight Warrior. *"Darkness. . . dangers. . . evil things and such rise at times like these. I warn you not to go."*

He froze.

Don't go to the gathering? he thought with disbelief. *Of course I am going to go! Voices don't tell me what to do!*

Suddenly, he woke up. The Gathering patrol was already getting ready, and he saw Dewpaw standing over him, urging him to get up. Groaning, Icepaw did as so. He slowly stood on to his paws and yawned loudly. He also stretched, shaking all the moss off of his pelt.

Dewpaw shook eagerly. "We're leaving now!" he meowed eagerly. "Let's go. Our mentors are waiting." He turned and looked for a second. "So are you excited about the gathering?"

Icepaw hesitated. *Darkness . . . dangers . . . evil things and such rise at times like these. I warn you not to go.* "Er . . . of course I am," he lied. He was nervous. "It's my first gathering, after all, right?"

Chapter Six

Edited ✔

Icepaw's light gray pelt shimmered in the almost fully risen moon. It cast out a beautiful ghastly light in the river. MoonClan's patrol was now crossing StreamClan since it was the only way to get to the Gathering place, and already, all of their paws were wet, and all of their noses were filled with the scents of fish and water. There was a StreamClan group somewhere nearby.

He ran and caught up with his brother, Dewpaw. Mousetail and Dewpaw were talking about the other day's training. He didn't pay attention much. His ears strained somewhere else, while his eyes drifted back up to the moon. He thought, mainly about his own mentor.

Ashtail was still yet to teach Icepaw of MoonClan's abilities. Every Clan had their own abilities, his mother had once told him. Icepaw had only heard of his own Clan's moon advantages, and abilities about their grace. But he had never truly learned it, or even gave it a thought until now. He saw a squirrel high up on a tree, which looked as agile as a cat as it fearlessly leaped on to another tree.

Behind him, Ashtail ran up. "There," he whispered, almost startling Icepaw. "Look at the squirrel. It looks exactly like a MoonClan cat." He watched as it's moon-kissed gray pelt disappeared into a tree. It's bushy tail was the last thing Icepaw could see before it was fully gone.

"I'll learn that, won't I?" Icepaw asked Ashtail. "I'll be as elegant as a squirrel. I never thought about how MoonClan cats really had the abilities of climbing trees so good. Can't *every* cat climb, though?"

MoonClan wouldn't be so special like the other Clans if all cats could climb a simple tree. It was one of the easiest things. He didn't know who wouldn't be able to do it.

Ashtail shrugged. "Perhaps most cats know," he said. "But in reality, only MoonClan knows how to master tree climbing this good. That's why we have big paws and strong forepaws and more elegant tails." Icepaw paid attention well. "It makes it easier to climb, easier to balance. And plus, we can climb trees at *night* with only the moon to guide our paw steps. That's one reason how we got out Clan name. It's like StreamClan. Any cat can swim if they wanted to, but it's their specialty, not ours."

Icepaw understood a bit more now. He had an urge of asking Ashtail every single question that flooded in hs mind. But the first one he found came straight out of his mouth: "Are there any more abilities?"

His mentor half shrugged, half nodded. "I don't call them abilities, I call them talents, and I guess so," Ashtail replied. "About two cats in our Clan can swim. But we aren't good. We are good at hiding in undergrounds, but MarshClan can do the same. What really makes us special is how moonlight can shine off our eyes. From what I've experienced, he have an easier time seeing things in the dark."

"How are our eyes any different from other cats?"

"I believe it comes from MoonClan heritage. We pass these qualities from elders to kits, and we learn it by getting used to it as well."

Icepaw then noticed much his Clanmate's eyes sparked or looked so strong. Perhaps this was MoonClan's special abilities; their advantage in the darkness and closeness to the moon.

"Well, anyways, our apprentices are always tested with these abilities. In a few moons, you will probably be tested yourself, although it isn't guaranteed that you might need it."

Icepaw nodded and kept walking. Even now, on his way to the gathering, he was learning such interesting things about MoonClan cats. He now wondered what made StreamClan strong swimmers. He figured out that they can hold their breaths longer than any other cats and they can open their eyes underwater. He also knew how fast CloudClan cats were, and how sly and sneaky and well-hidden MarshClan cats were. He had not a clue of DarkClan. If he

knew, he would of heard already. As Ashtail explained everything, Icepaw was impressed at how much knowledge his mentor had.

Soon, many scents began to arise. It must be the other three Clans, because StreamClan was close behind the MoonClan group. Icepaw's pelt bristled with excitement. He walked closer and pressed to Dewpaw, who was also excited. It was their first gathering!

"Let's go ahead, to Sparrowheart!" Dewpaw whispered loudly. Some of ther Clanmate heard them, some sighed agrily, some shushed the two noisy apprentices. For some reason, everyone quieted down. They all slowed down as well.

Dewpaw began to lead Icepaw away, running and pushing through the large MoonClan crowd. Everyone was becoming tense, except for a few cats. Icepaw guessed because it was probably since DarkClan was at the gathering. Icepaw knew exactly how brute and mean their Clan were. He once almost fought Flamepaw, a DarkClan apprentice out of force by DarkClan's crazy leader Sandstar. He hardly knew any fighting moves then. Flamepaw was obviousy more experienced and Icepaw had no idea what to do.

He let out a shaky breath, and kept his nose on his brother's tail to keep track of where he was going. It seemed that they were almost to the front of the group now since Sparrowheart was in sight. The two apprentices ran up to him, excited, nervous and scared all at once.

Sparrowheart's tail flicked and it touched Icepaw's ears. He looked back up at Brightstar, who was leading the patrol. Her bright pelt shimmered against the moonlight, and it almost looked like a StarClan cat's pelt. It reminded him of that she-cat he ran into a few times—a beautiful silver, the one who had saved him in the dream the day of his apprentice ceremony.

He forced himself to shake away the memory.

The MoonClan cats began to slip through the entrance to the Gathering clearing. Brightstar turned. She pointed her tail to the side of the gathering, where the trees and bushes were the thickest.

"File as much as you can on the trees," Brightstar whispered. "Get the lowest branches. If not many cats can fit, stay away from the other Clans, especially DarkClan."

Sparrowheart nodded. "Move out," he called to the Clan.

Dawnpaw walked by Icepaw, and her pelt brushed on his as they walked. "Wanna sit by each other?" she asked, her voice only above a whisper.

Icepaw looked around. "Well . . . I wanted to see this DarkClan cat," he said.

Dawnpaw gasped. "Why would you do that? You know what DarkClan did to us," she replied with a soft growl. For some reason, his Clan seemed to only *hate* the DarkClan cats.

"Well . . . remember Flamepaw? I'd like to talk to him," Icepaw admitted. "Please sit by Dewpaw, and don't tell anyone where I am. It'll be quick. When I'm done talking I'll try and squeeze by to you."

Dawnpaw sighed. "Fine, whatever," she mumbled, walking over to Dewpaw.

Icepaw felt a bit bad. But he knew that Flamepaw was here—Sandstar seemed fond of him and treasured him since he was her apprentice. Sandstar sat in the front of the large rock the leaders gathered on all the time. She was licking her paws, glaring all around. Icepaw shuttered.

He looked around and opened his jaws to see or smell if his friend was here. Finally, he spotted Flamepaw, sitting in the dark in the back. Flamepaw's pelt looked ruffled and he seemed tired. Icepaw had second thoughts about approaching him, but then Flamepaw's amber eyes met Icepaw's.

He froze for a second, and then waved his tail. Flamepaw got up and walked over, his ginger pelt looking darker than ever. He sighed as soon as he got to Icepaw.

"Hello," he said. "Would you like to sit over by me? Sandstar won't be able to see. I'm sitting in the dark over there, like you saw."

"Sure," Icepaw said as he released of his breath. He didn't know why he was relieved. Maybe it was because Flamepaw didn't seem to have betrayed him to his Clan. Speaking of that . . . "I haven't told my Clan about what you told me. You know, the warrior code thing?" His voice was low so others wouldn't hear.

"Oh, you didn't?" Flamepaw looked surprised. "I thought . . . never mind. Let's go sit. StreamClan just got here so the gathering is going to start."

Icepaw looked over and saw as a whole bunch of cats with sleek, wet fur. He assumed that they were swimming before they got here —probably to cross their lake to get to the other side. He turned back to Flamepaw who was already headed back to his dark spot.

Icepaw followed, running to catch up.

The two apprentice toms sat down right next to each other. Icepaw looked up to see Brightstar and Lakestar taking their places. Everyone who was talking settled down. Icepaw looked and saw his Clan among the trees, away from everyone else.

Sandstar, her eyes crazed and fur ruffled, stood taller. She was missing many tufts of her light ginger fur, which would be beautiful if it weren't so uncared for. Icepaw noticed for the first time that her eyes were a dark amber. Her movements and structure reminded Icepaw of someone . . . but he couldn't quite recall who.

"I will start," said Sandstar. "No objections, I presume?" She looked back to the other four leaders. They all remained silent. "Alright then. DarkClan is thriving, first of all. The air might be getting cold soon but our Clan has an abundance of prey."

Her eyes beamed.

Right besides him, Flamepaw growled of anger. "What lies."

"Every Clan leader lies at a Gathering," Icepaw said. "Or at least they exaggerate. Well, they never state their weaknesses. I've heard about it."

Flamepaw nodded and pointed to the top of the rock where the

leaders sat.

"And my patrols are doubling," Sandstar said, casting a glance at Brightstar. "We don't want any intruders coming onto our side of the border. We'll be keeping a close watch."

Brightstar snarled. "What are you saying, Sandstar?"

The DarkClan leader shrugged. "All I am saying is that my Clan will not want anymore *intruders,*" she hissed back. Her ears flattened to Brightstar. "And we also have a new apprentice in my Clan, Beetlepaw."

A small kit raised his head, looking proud among his Clan. "Beetlepaw! Beetlepaw!" the large DarkClan group chanted. Some StreamClan cats chanted, too, and some MarshClan cats as well. Sandstar nodded and sat down, wrapping her molted tail around her paws neatly. She nodded to finish her announcements.

"Beetlepaw looks too small to be an apprentice," murmured Icepaw to Flamepaw.

"Well, maybe he just doesn't grow as fast," said Flamepaw quickly. "Shh, it's not over yet."

Icepaw nodded and looked up. "It's my turn," Brightstar said, before any leader. She stood up, and the moon glinted off her pelt. "*Our* Clan is doing well, too. With lead-fall on it's way our Clan is doing just fine. We've been finding enough prey on our territory."

It was somewhat true. Icepaw's Clan has been finding some prey, but not too much for the past few days. Everyone had their suspicions that it was because of DarkClan, but Brightstar didn't mention that.

"The phrase *fine* must mean that MoonClan isn't at its best," muttered Sandstar, loud enough for a variety of cats to hear.

"It's Brightstar's turn!" Sparrowheart snapped.

The MoonClan leader was glaring at Sandstar. "Thank you, Sparrowheart. About a half-moon ago, we named two new

apprentices," said Brightstar. "Icepaw and Dewpaw. Their training is doing well and I give praise to our new future warriors." She dipped her head near the MoonClan group.

"Icepaw! Dewpaw! Icepaw! Dewpaw!" his Clan chanted. A few other Clans chanted too, but no DarkClan cats. Icepaw straightened his back in pride and had a determined look on his face. Brightstar looked down and spotted Icepaw—their eyes met. She looked as if she had questions about where Icepaw sat, and he sank down to his spot.

"Moving on, my Clan is also raising our border patrols. We don't want any intruders either." Brightstar turned her gaze to Sandstar. The DarkClan leader's pelt was bristling and she was snarling a bit. Icepaw wondered if they were going to rip of each other's pelts soon. "That's all I have to say for tonight." She sat down.

Lakestar got up this time. "It's my turn," he said quickly. Lakestar was a gray tom cat with blue eyes and a torn ear. His pelt was a bit damp, and his muscles shone under his glossy fur.

"StreamClan has been getting lots of fish this season," he began with pride. "Not much is happening at my territory that is giving us trouble, and Moleheart's mate has moved into the nursery, expecting his kits."

He looked down to his deputy, and cast a warm glance. "Shimmerpelt has also had kits this past moon; Troutkit and Rainkit. Our Clan grows each day with more and more new joys." He sighed with contentment. "And the Twolegs are starting to stay away from our river now that the days are getting colder. We've been growing as strong as any Clan."

He sat back down.

"Done?" asked Rabbitstar, the large black and white tom cat with amber eyes and many scars.

"Yes, you may go now, Rabbitstar," said Lakestar.

Rabbitstar nodded. "MarshClan has been thriving," he said slowly.

He's watching what he is saying, realized Icepaw. His eyes were clouded with many emotions and he looked grief-stricken. Many other cats noticed too.

"We caught a lot of prey this past moon, too, thanks to StarClan," he continued.

A MarshClan cat's voice rose. "Get on with it, Rabbitstar," she said encouragingly. The cat was a white she-cat with green eyes. She seemed sad too, but empathetic.

"How rude," Sandstar growled, casting a glance at the white MarshClan she-cat. "Let your leader speak, you impatient crow-food."

Rabbitstar hissed. "Don't you dare speak about my medicine cat that way!" Rabbitstar threatened. "If Daisyleap has something to say, we all know *any* medicine cat might as well speak their minds!" He stared at Sandstar, waiting for a response.

Icepaw looked up to the sky, to see the clouds shifting over the moon a tiny bit. Sandstar didn't respond to Rabbitstar's harsh reply.

"Moving on, a brave warrior in my Clan has died. We all know her from what she has done for us all." Rabbitstar trailed off and sighed. "Grasspelt, one of our most respected senior warriors, died defending the camp from a dog who threatened us. We managed to drive the dog away but it had resulted in her death. We sat vigil for her yesterday."

Brightstar set her tail softly down on Rabbitstar's spine. "I know how it feels. Grasspelt once saved an apprentice from my Clan. We all knew her and always thanked her. She will be missed and respected among MoonClan," she said sympathetically.

Rabbitstar nodded gratefully and sat down.

Swiftstar stood up now. He was CloudClan's leader. " I am sorry for your loss, Rabbitstar," the large black-and-white tom said.

"Thank you," mewed Rabbitstar, dipping his head to the other leader.

The CloudClan leader looked down to the DarkClan group. "My Clan is doing well," he started slowly. He looked angry. "Three new warriors were made—Pinefur, Longleap and Crowclaw."

He stopped there so the three warriors could be recognized. "Pinefur! Longleap! Crowclaw!" all the Clans but DarkClan chanted. Icepaw was chanting, too, because he knew one day that it would be him.

"I am also raising the border patrol frequency in CloudClan. Lately we have founs DarkClan scents in our territory, along with prey scatterings. I do not understand it. Doesn't DarkClan have a big enough territory and quite enough food?" He looked at Sandstar accusingly.

Flamepaw's claws scrunched the ground below him. "That was a threat," he murmered to himself.

Icepaw looked at Flamepaw and wondered if it was really true. Did DarkClan—including Flamepaw—steal from another Clan just like that?

Sandstar's tail flicked. "Are you accusing me of something?" she demanded.

Swiftstar nodded. "That's exactly what I am doing," he replied. "I know that you were on my Clan territory. I will not accept no for an answer."

"Fine then!" Sandstar growled, leaping onto Swiftstar.

"Stop, Sandstar!" Brightstar yowled, trying to rip off the DarkClan leader from the CloudClan leader. She was clawing at his pelt, biting down onto his scruff.

"Stop this fighting!" yowled Sparrowheart.

Swiftstar raked Sandstar's belly with his hind claws, snarling ferociously.

Vinetail gasped. "Look at the moon!" the medicine cat exclaimed, pointing upwards. StarClan was covering the sky with the clouds,

and all the light was soon gone. Sandstar climbed off of Swiftstar, and the large, proud leader grunted in pain.

"You're crazy!" he growled to Sandstar.

Murmurs of agreement rippled through the four Clans. Whiteleap, the DarkClan deputy, grunted in disagreement and flicked his tail. Lakestar sighed and looked down to the Clans. "The truce for this moon has been broken by Sandstar!" he yowled. "Tonight's gathering is therefore dismissed!"

Icepaw sighed of sadness. It was supposed to be a bit longer—and he should of met a lot of new cats. It was his first gathering and tonight wasn't so good. He looked right over to Flamepaw. "Well, I guess I will see you around," he said to his DarkClan friend.

"Yeah, I guess so," replied Flamepaw. "Maybe I'll see you on a patrol or at the next gathering. But I'm not so sure we can speak like we do now."

"I understand," murmured Icepaw.

They dipped heads and Flamepaw bounded off to his Clan, who were gathering all together, preparing to leave. Icepaw went to the trees where his Clan waited.

Brightstar walked up and nodded to MoonClan. "Come on," she said. "We must go."

Chapter Seven

Edited ✔

It's been half a moon since Icepaw went to his first gathering.

He lay comfortably in his den beside Dawnpaw and Dewpaw and Volepaw. Today, it was their day off. Brightstar had seen how hard they worked and allowed them for a day's rest. Icepaw was thankful.

Dawnpaw poked him with her nose. "Hey," she whispered. "Are you awake?"

Icepaw yawned. "Yes."

Dawnpaw sighed. "It's so warm out. Want to go out and doze in the sun or something? It's not gonna last for leaf-bare."

Icepaw yawned again and opened his eyes, to see Dawnpaw standing right over him. The apprentice she-cat looked tired too, but she seemed right. Today was such a sunny day. He got up from his nest—Dewpaw stirred, Volepaw twitched. They seemed to be relaxing well.

He stretched out his muscles luxuriously and crawled after Dawnpaw out of the den. He could immediately see that the camp looked deserted. Most warriors were out border patrolling, and some were out hunting. Sparrowheart was sharing prey with Brightstar in the leader's den, discussing matters with each other. The elders were resting right outside their den.

Even Vinetail was in camp today.

"Such a nice day," murmured Icepaw, looking up into the clear sky. There was not a cloud in sight, and the bright rays of light beemed into his eyes. He averted his eyes from the painfully bright light.

Bluewing picked a vole from the fresh kill pile and nodded in

agreement. "There won't be any more days like this for a while," the warrior she-cat commented. "Hey Icepaw, I know you're on a break, but can you give this vole to Ripplefur?"

"Sure," he said, taking it from Bluewing's jaws. He padded to the nursery with Dawnpaw at his heels. He could see the queen laying down in the back of the nursery, her eyes wide open in pain. Grayfur was crouched right by the queen.

"Hi, Ripplefur," Icepaw mewed gently. "Is everything okay?" He set down the vole in front of the queen.

"Everything's fine," said Grayfur. "It's just that Ripplefur is having some cramps. That happens to she-cats when they are expecting kits."

"Oh," Icepaw murmured. "Well, I brought you this vole. Bluewing thought you might be hungry." He nudged the fresh-kill towards Ripplefur.

"Thank you . . . " she said. "I'll eat it later. I haven't been feeling hungry."

Dawnpaw walked up to her sister, and sniffed her lightly. "Are you sure you're okay?" she asked. "Maybe you're close to kitting. Maybe that's why your back must hurt so much."

"If it is the kits, we should probably get Vinetail," said Grayfur. "Tell him that Ripplefur is having her pains again. He'll know what to bring for this." She looked down to the queen and sighed. "I hope it really is the kits this time. They're due any day now."

"Come on, Dawnpaw," said Icepaw, padding out of the nursery.

"Do you think it's time?" she asked eagerly when they were out of earshot from the nursery. "If it is, then I can't wait!"

Icepaw nodded and walked into the medicine den. Vinetail was sorting out his large herb supply. He was preparing for the leaf-bare since it was near, and he said that he wanted to make sure that he had enough supplies for the long and cold season. He waited until the medicine cat noticed him.

"Yes?" Vinetail asked.

"Ripplefur is in pain. Her, err, cramps are back," Icepaw informed the medicine cat. He didn't know why but he always felt awkward talking about she-cat topics—things such as kits and whatnot. "She looks bad. Can you please check on her?"

Vinetail nodded. "Yes, of course."

The went back to the nursery, this time with the medicine cat. Vinetail checked onto Ripplefur, his paws kneading over her belly after he finished sniffing around her pelt. "Hmm . . . it seems that you are in a very close stage to kitting," he said. "We'd better be very prepared."

Ripplefur nodded. "I feel it," she grunted. "Get Skypelt!"

"Didn't Skypelt go on a hunting patrol?" asked Dawnpaw.

"Yes, he did," said Grayfur. "Please, go find him. It's a mission—but just do it for Ripplefur. I think the kits are really coming." She sighed. "Take Bluewing with you. They went near the StreamClan borders, I think." She dipped her head.

StreamClan . . . I don't think that's far. "Come on!" Icepaw said to Dawnpaw. "We have to hurry." *Skypelt wouldn't want to miss this!*

Dawnpaw nodded and raced out of the nursery, straight to Bluewing, who was eating a small mouse. "Bluewing! I think Ripplefur is kitting, and she wants us to get Skypelt. Can you come with us to find him?" Dawnpaw asked.

Bluewing gulped down her last bite and her eyes widened. "Wow, really? Sure! Where to?"

"StreamClan borders," Icepaw said. "Let's go!"

He raced out of the camp entrance. He could already smell where the patrol went. Each day of apprenticeship, his senses were becoming more refined. Bluewing came right after Icepaw and opened her jaws to scent the air. She seemed to have caught something. Dawnpaw trudged out of the entrance next.

Bluewing began to lead the way towards the path that lead to the StreamClan borders. The sun was at it's highest position, the prey scents all around smelled good and fresh in the air. Cats swarmed the forest—Icepaw could scent them. Amongst the jumble of trees, he could smell faint tracks of earlier that day where Skypelt and his patrol passed by. The others obviously smelt it too, which was indeed headed near StreamClan borders.

Icepaw's paws pounded hard onto the forest floor. He was excited, nervous and scared. He wondered what the worse possible thing that could happen to the kits or the young queen, since Ripplefur was so young. He was *very* nervous.

He raced as fast as his paws could take him, with Dawnpaw following behind. He hoped that he would find Skypelt in time—it would sure help Ripplefur.

"I can't believe Ripplefur's kits decided to come now!" Dawnpaw said. "They should of come sooner when I wasn't relaxing."

Icepaw nodded of agreement. All he wanted to do was relax too, after all.

"You can't choose when the kits will come," said Bluewing with disapproval. She kept on running, sniffing the air eagerly to see if she could find Ripplefur's mate. Icepaw began to sniff the air too, wondering if he would find Skypelt. Finally, he caught the warrior's scent.

"I found him!" Bluewing and Icepaw almost said in unison. They looked at each other. "Lead the way, Icepaw. It'll be better if you do it since it's your mission."

"It's my mission too!" Dawnpaw retorted.

"Let's go together," he said, beginning to run again.

A light breeze stirred and the trees and bushes rattled. Icepaw froze. Dawnpaw ran into his rump, and Bluewing stopped as well.

"What's wrong?" asked Dawnpaw.

Icepaw growled under his breath. "It's the wind. I lost the scent as soon as the breeze stirred," he replied in frustration.

Bluewing began to walk forward. "I think I may be able to still scent it. Keep following me," said Bluewing, beginning to trot forward.

Icepaw and Dawnpaw followed, side by side. Bluewing concentrated deeply into the air, and the scents around her. Icepaw wondered if her nose was really that strong to withstand such winds. Finally, she nodded. "I certainly scent him. Come on!"

Bluewing began to run again towards the StreamClan borders. Icepaw and Dawnpaw kept up with the warrior, both of them excited. They could see Skypelt in the distance, finally. Icepaw began to run harder towards the warrior. His white pelt was ruffled, his amber eyes alerted.

"Skypelt!" Dawnpaw called.

He began to trot up to them. Sedgetooth began to trot up as well. "What's wrong?" he asked before Skypelt could say anything. Softpelt looked over from the two toms.

"Ripplefur. It's Ripplefur," panted Bluewing.

Skypelt tensed. "What's wrong? She's not kitting, is she?"

"She is," exclaimed Icepaw. "You have to get back to camp!"

"Let's go!" said Skypelt with worry, though he sounded eager at the same time. He began to pound into the forest, Dawnpaw after him. Bluewing looked at Softpelt and Sedgetooth.

"Wanna come too?" she asked.

"Sure," said Softwing. "We finished patrolling so we'll be fine. We were going to go back anyways."

Sedgetooth nodded of agreement. "I can't believe the kits are coming!"

"Follow me, then," said Bluewing.

She turned and began to lead Softwing and Sedgetooth away from the StreamClan borders.

Icepaw remained where he was. The wind blew into another direction, bringing a putrid scent to Icepaw's nose. A soft but cruel voice whispered in his head: *fate, darkness, blood . . .*

He didn't know why but something was holding him back. *A voice*, he thought. *Someone* was holding him back, not something. Icepaw suddenly felt spooked, like the two dreams he had about the Twilight Warrior. His fur rose up on his back, but he forced it to lie flat as a new tingly feeling reached his paws. He could see the cave of mosses. The first time he went into the cave of mosses, it was for his duty. This time it was calling for him.

He padded towards it.

The moss scents were already swelling over his nose as he approached the cave. Finally, Icepaw reached it. The entrance was still the same—small and suffocating—but he knew he could go through. Icepaw squeezed his growing body through the entrance.

Enter, the voice whispered. *Within darkness you will meet fate in the midst of blood.*

Icepaw shivered, but knew that it was what he had to do. The urge to listen to the strange voice was strong. He made sure he held his breath deeply. Then, he began to crawl through swiftly. He didn't know how to hold his breath for too long. If he lost his breath in the middle of crawling through, he could suffocate and die. There was nobody else here to help him.

Through that fear, Icepaw quickly made it to the other side and took a deep breath. He glanced around. It looked the same as usual. The mosses were glowing against the deep, dark cave, and the floor was moist. Water droplets could be heard from the back of the cave. He could also hear something else.

There's more? he thought. The new sound sort of echoed, and the cave was too small to echo. That means that there must be something else coming from the back of the cave! He padded to

forward. The mosses' dim light shone enough for him to see a small black hole. It was the size of his paw.

Icepaw stuck his paw into the hole and felt what was under. It was another tunnel! He began to move his paws so that he could break the thin surrounding rock. It crumbled like dirt under his legs as he tried to make a big enough hole for him to fit through.

Finally, Icepaw had done the job. The voice praised him, and told him to keep moving forward. Icepaw did so.

He crawled into the small space he had made himself, and under paw he could feel coarse grass. The soil was rocky with tiny patches of heather. The air smelled faint of other creatures, possibly other cats as well. It was *very* faint, but he could smell it.

Icepaw began to walk deeper into the tunnels. Beside the grass and heather and stones under paw, he could also feel paw prints. Had cats before Icepaw walked in these tunnels?

"I wonder what's down there?" murmured Icepaw to himself as he began to go deeper into the tunnel. His heart raced. It was pitch black and not being able to see anything hurt his eyes, which were accustomed to moon and light. His eyes were not as strong as his Clanmates, but they were progressively becoming better-sighted.

A loud echoing squeak sounded. Icepaw's fur bristled, and he froze in his tracks. A mouse scurried right from his paws and into another dark crack in the wall. Icepaw could smell its fear scent. He began to pad deeper into the cave again, and this time, he was more curious. The voice stopped speaking, and he was nervous all at the same time.

After a few moments, he could see something shimmering up ahead. Icepaw realized that it was light. Excitement surged through his belly as he began to run towards it. The light illuminated and moved on the wall, and it had a tang of the color crystal blue. He realized that the light was shining water. Bright water.

He reached the reflection of the water, turned, and saw a large underground clearing. It wasn't grass anymore. Now, the underpaw

was rock and so were the walls. In the middle of the clearing, a huge, bright pool of water shone. He padded closer and gazed down into his reflection. The water looked the most crisp and clear he has ever seen.

It made him a bit thirsty.

Icepaw leaned up and took a few laps of the water. But suddenly, he felt himself loose his footing. Icepaw gasped, and he fell into the cold, clear, shining bright water.

"No!" shrieked Icepaw. "Help!"

He suddenly wished that when he was coming back from patrol that he'd accepted Rosepetal's offer to learn how to swim. He said no since he didn't like water. He cursed himself for listening to that voice as well. *I'm such a fool*!

Icepaw began to swim towards the ledge he fell from but it was too late, he couldn't reach it. Icepaw felt his head sink under water. When he looked down, he saw how deep it was. He could see fish swimming away from him at the bottom of the pool.

He held his breath under water, hoping that he would figured out how to swim. Panicked, he paddled his paws and legs and got to the surface again. He took a deep breath and sunk right back down.

I don't think I can get out of here! thought Icepaw with complete fear.

He stopped struggling and held his breath. But suddenly, it did not feel that he was in water anymore. He felt like he was in thicker, warmer water. His eyes opened, and he realized that he was in no place similar to a lake. He was in a lake of blood! Icepaw's mouth opened, and he immedietly tasted the blood. He shut back his eyes and kept holding his breath. It was what the voice instructed him, about going through darkness and also something about being in the midst of blood. Was he also going to meet his fate here—a fate of death?

Please, let it be a dream! Let it be a dream! Let it be a dream! Icepaw pleaded in his mind. He was scared out of his guts and had not a

clue what to do.

Suddenly, a thick dark voice sounded, much different to the first voice. It felt as if it were whispering in his ears. *The darkness was never meant to be—*

A pair of claws hooked into his scruff.

Icepaw felt himself being dragged out of the lake. The sight of blood slowly faded into water, and he realized that it was not real. Thank StarClan it was not real!

He was plopped onto the cold rock, and he coughed up a lot of water. Icepaw felt the bad taste of bile through all the coughing. The apprentice's lungs were stinging and so were his eyes. Even his fur felt uncomfortable, for it still felt that the blood of the lake was clinging to his skin. When his breathing settled down, he looked up to who had saved him. It was Flamepaw!

"Flamepaw . . ." gasped Icepaw, coughing a bit. "You—how—thank you!" Icepaw did not know why he was stuttering.

"It's no problem, Icepaw," replied Flamepaw. "What were you doing in there anyways?"

"Oh, you know, just drowning," snapped Icepaw. He sounded more harsh than he had meant to. "Err . . . sorry. Wait, why are *you* here? I came from a cave on my territory to down here. Don't tell me you trespassed into MoonClan!"

Flamepaw shook his head. "DarkClan cats have access to a cave, too," he said. "There's a tunnel that leads here and many other places. If you don't tell your Clan you have access to DarkClan, I will not tell my Clan that we have access to MoonClan."

"O-okay," said Icepaw. "Well, I really do have to go back up! My Clan must be waiting, there are kits being born and I was on this mission to find the father from patrol—*urrgh*, never mind, I have to get going!" Icepaw stopped himself from telling Flamepaw all about his life story.

"Okay," said Flamepaw. "Well, you'd better hurry then."

Icepaw gave a curt nod and dashed away. Just as he was leaving, he thought about the voice in his mind when he was drowning in the blood. When all of the pure lake water turned to the scarlet, deadly red. He also remembered the terrifying voices; the first one that instructed him to go to that dreadful place, and the second that recited the scary darkness. *I shouldn't go there again*, he decided.

But I should tell some cat about it . . .

* * *

Icepaw had made it to camp.

Everyone looked at him as soon as he walked through the entrance. The sun was at its highest peak, beating down onto Icepaw's drying flank. He wanted to return sooner when his fur was all dry, but it couldn't be helped. If he had been any sooner, Brightstar might have sent out unnecessary search patrols.

Featherbreeze was the first to run up to him, her expression extremely worried. "Oh, my poor kit! Where have you been?" she demanded. "Bluewing told me that one moment you were with her and the next, you disappeared!"

"I—" he began.

"Why are you all wet, too?" she asked again.

"I sort of fell into a lake," said Icepaw. "But I pulled myself out and I made it back to camp just in time. How are Ripplefur's kits?"

Featherbreeze sighed and looked down to her paws. Volepaw trotted up from the group of cats surrounding the nursery. "The kits are so cute!" he said. "Oh, and Ripplefur said she wanted to see you."

"Okay," said Icepaw.

He began to go to the queen's den. He squeezed past the group of cats and crawled into the nursery. Icepaw was surprised at how much he had outgrew it. He immediately saw Ripplefur huddled around three kits, Skypelt right besides them. He looked happy.

"Hi," Icepaw mewed softly. He felt like an intrusion since his pelt was damp. He didn't want to bother anyone, but they didn't seem to mind.

Ripplefur looked up weakly. "Icepaw," she said. "You came just in time. I already named them."

Icepaw nodded. "What are they called?"

Ripplefur pointed to one with black fur and white patches she looked like a mix of both of her parents. "This little she-kit is named Spottedkit." Then, she turned to a tom kit with dark gray fur. "His name, we decided, would be Squirrelkit, because his fur resembles a gray squirrel." She turned to her final kit. It was a silver she-kit. "And this is my darling Silverkit."

Icepaw's eyes widened. *Silverkit. . . . ?*

Something about that little she-kit sent a shiver up his spine. The tiny little silver kit squealed, pressing close to her mother's belly for more milk. This kit looked awfully familiar, but he did not remember who she resembled. Icepaw really badly wanted to remember, but perhaps something deep down inside was holding him back from receiving memories.

He kept his eyes on her. *Silverkit . . . where do I know you from*?

Chapter Eight

Edited ✔

Wow . . . Super long chapter! Thanks for the reads I have been getting so far :) This book is getting better and better, don't you think? Please comment, rate, vote, share, or any type of support :D Also, I do not own Warriors — obviously this is a fanfic ^.^

It's been half a moon since the kits were born. Icepaw crouched over his prey and ate slowly. He could hear Ripplefur coughing in the nursery den miserably along with her other kit, Spottedkit. They have been coughing for a few days now, and the only times Silverkit and Squirrelkit were aloud in the nursery den was when they needed their mother's milk.

The two kits rested peacefully in the elder's den right now. The black bird Dewpaw caught felt cold as he chewed it, and his heart swelled for the sick queen and kit.

Finally, he gulped down his last piece. Dewpaw padded up from behind Icepaw and sat in front of him. He sighed. "I feel bad for Skypelt," murmured the white tom-cat.

"Me too," admitted Icepaw. "Ripplefur and Spottedkit were doing perfectly fine just a few days ago. I don't know what happened."

"It's the weather, that's all," growled Vinetail. "Cats get sick easily in leaf-bare if they don't properly care for themselves."

Fireshade sighed and sat down right by his mate, Nightrose. "We can't control whether nor if we get sick," he objected.

"Yeah," agreed Nightrose. "It just comes. I mean, I would hate to be sick, of course. And I don't like it when my Clanmates are sick, either."

"It's a big weakness," added Fireshade with a small growl.

Dewpaw nodded. "I've heard that when or if the other Clans find out we have sick cats, they will attack. So, the fact is suppose to be a secret?" He quickly turned to the sick queen and kit and turned back to Fireshade and Nightrose.

"It's a secret, yes," said Vinetail. "But if the result is death—"

"Ripplefur won't die!" exclaimed Icepaw. "She can't die! She has kits to take care of." The thought of Ripplefur dying made him sick to the stomach. And how will her kits, her mate, and every other cat cope?

Vinetail sighed. "Hopefully you are right. But when it results in death from a much worse sickness than Ripplefur and Spottedkit has, then the other Clans must know. But Clan leaders have to be very careful when they tell a Gathering that a Clan member died. If they knew it was a sickness that killed them, then the enemy would know we are weak."

"We aren't weak, it is just a cough," said Nightrose. "Maybe it'll pass on."

Vinetail sighed and nodded, beginning to pad away to his den. Sweetpaw emerged right from the medicine den at the same moment. She walked right towards Icepaw. "I have to speak to you," she whispered.

Icepaw looked at Dewpaw, who was talking to Nightrose and Fireshade. He turned back to the medicine cat apprentice. "Okay, sure."

Sweetpaw nodded and began to lead him away from all the other cats in the clearing. A cold breeze blew, and the red and orange leaves on the leaf fall forest floor crunched beneath their paws.

Sweetpaw lead Icepaw right outside the camp entrance. Her eyes looked sad. Icepaw could also see from the corner of his eye that Brightstar was watching the two apprentices with a watchful gaze. He ignored it and turned to Sweetpaw.

"So what is it you need to talk about?" he asked, confused. Normally

all Sweetpaw would talk about was new herbs she learned or new battle moves to defend herself. She couldn't possibly take him to somewhere private to discuss the same things over again.

Sweetpaw sighed. "Ripplefur and Spottedkit have greencough," she said.

Icepaw gasped. "What? Why? I thought Vinetail was taking care of them as if they were his own kits!"

"He is," said Sweetpaw. "But nothing he tries is working to heal them."

"What about catmint?" he asked. "I know that catmint is suppose to cure greencough. We have some, right? I helped Vinetail collect some a few days ago. You were there."

Sweetpaw nodded. "I know. But we *did* give her some. It didn't work. Vinetail is still trying to get her better but we decided to not tell any cat about it. Vinetail said that it would put worry to our Clan and we wouldn't do that."

"Does Skypelt know?"

Sweetpaw nodded.

"I feel very sorry for him now," admitted Icepaw.

Icepaw thought about it. When he grows up and has his own mate and kits, he would be extremely sad if they were sick with greencough that wouldn't go away. He would know that it was a possible chance for them to die. He knew his heart wouldn't be able to take it.

"And there's one more thing," said Sweetpaw, her voice lowering much lower now. "Lately, I have been having visions of two cats, high and proud—one was upon a rock, leading a Clan and the other one was planning to destroy that very Clan."

Icepaw's thoughts snapped from the thought of Ripplefur's sickness to what Sweetpaw has just told him. "Wait, why are you telling me this?" asked Icepaw, confused. "Am I one of those cats?"

Sweetpaw shook her head. "I don't know. It can be just about anyone. But I had a feeling I should tell you because Vinetail mentioned that you were acting weird lately. I also told you about Ripplefur because you two seemed close to each other."

Am I acting strange?

"Tonight, though, Vinetail and I are going to go to the Night Flower to share our dreams with StarClan. It was about time since tonight there will be a half moon. I might learn more from StarClan tonight. I don't know." Sweetpaw paused and looked up to the sky. "I decided to fill you in on these problems, and for you to, you know, keep an eye on things."

"I—I guess so . . ." murmured Icepaw. He still did not know how this had anything to do with him. "Why do you say I am acting strange?"

"Vinetail said that," said Sweetpaw. "And I don't know. You seem perfectly fine to me. But when Vinetail says something, it's not for no reason."

"I guess so," said Icepaw. "All I have been doing lately were my apprentice duties, some training with Ashtail and normal Clan stuff."

"That's good."

Icepaw nodded. "So do we just get back to camp right now?" he asked, nervous. Brightstar was still staring the two apprentices, her gaze watchful and curious. "Brightstar might become suspicious."

Sweetpaw turned a little and saw the leader. "I think—"

"Sweetpaw, you can go back," said a voice. Vinetail stalked out of a small bush, wiping off the leaves that clung to his pelt. "Icepaw, you may come with me."

Sweetpaw's eyes widened at the sight of her mentor. "Err, yes Vinetail," she said obediently, casting a sorry glance to Icepaw. He nodded to her to tell her that she should go. Sweetpaw turned and trotted into camp, immediately being greeted by her sister,

Dawnpaw.

Dawnpaw looked up and waved her tail. Icepaw dipped his head and turned back to Vinetail. "Why couldn't I go with her?"

"I need to talk to you," said Vinetail. "Because Sweetpaw isn't suppose to be wasting her time worrying her Clanmates."

"Sweetpaw didn't do anything wrong!" protested Icepaw. "Ripplefur is my good friend. She thought I deserved to know."

Vinetail sighed. "Well anyways, I am going to the Night Flower tonight as you may know," began the medicine cat, "but Sweetpaw and I will be gone. I need you to remain in camp when I leave and look after Ripplefur."

"Why do I have to do it?"

"Because you're the only one who knows that she has greencough except for her mate and my apprentice. And I don't trust Skypelt because he might be too . . . soft. Just, if she starts to cough, I expect you to give her some catmint. Keep her cool by putting nice cold moss water on her head. Do the same with Spottedkit, please. And don't give too much medicine to them, it'll make them feel more sick. If you need help, don't hesitate to ask someone."

Icepaw nodded. "I-I guess I'll try," he murmured. He barely knew anything about medicine, but he didn't want to let Vinetail down. "Can I go see her now?"

Vinetail shook his head. "She's asleep."

He began to pad into camp without another word. Icepaw sighed and followed his medicine cat, his heart dropping. Poor Spottedkit and Ripplefur . . . they don't deserve to be so sick. The least he could do was go and talk to them.

As Icepaw entered the camp, he could see Skypelt sleeping in the nursery den with his sick mate and kit. Silverkit and Squirrelkit played right outside the elder's den. They both squealed with delight as they play-fought. Icepaw's heart warmed a bit, knowing that they didn't get sick in their sleep too.

He padded to Silverkit and Squirrelkit. "You'll never catch me!" declared Squirrelkit with such eagerness.

"Yes I will!" squeaked Silverkit.

With her rump high in the air, she crouched down and leaped. As soon as her paws touched the grassy camp floor again, Squirrelkit leaped right out of the way. She looked up. "Mouse-dung!" the silver she-kit cursed. "I didn't leap fast enough."

Icepaw hid a laugh. "You were crouching wrong," he told her.

Silverkit gasped and looked up eagerly. "Hi, Icepaw!" she said. "Do you wanna play with me and Squirrelkit?"

Squirrelkit nodded. "Yeah! And you can also teach us how to leap and the basics of how to hunt or something like that. I am going to be MoonClan's best warrior ever!"

"I will be *leader,*" Silverkit said. Squirrelkit's eyes narrowed. "And when I am leader you can be my *deputy*. I already see it. Silverstar." She sighed at her leader name.

Squirrelkit scoffed. "You wish. So, Icepaw, wanna play?" He looked up hopefully at the MoonClan apprentice. His soft kit fur was ruffled, his eyes rounding with excitement. His brown eyes shone as light as Silverkit's blue ones.

"Okay, okay, I can play with you kits," said Icepaw. "What are you playing?"

Silverkit sat down. "We were just playing Catch the Mouse. I was the hunter and Squirrelkit was the mouse."

"But you missed and you didn't catch me, Silver*star*!" Squirrelkit teased. "Leaders never miss the prey they intend to catch."

"That's not true!" growled Silverkit. "Everyone can miss prey no matter how great you can be."

Icepaw nodded. "Silverkit is right. So do you both want me to teach you your proper hunter's crouch? Then, Silverkit, you will be able

to catch your brother."

"Yes please!" the two kits almost said in unison.

His heart swelled. Silverkit and Squirrelkit were so young . . . but yet, the sickness, possibly death, may be one of their first memories! He hoped that their mother and sister could get better soon.

"First, you crouch down like this," said Icepaw, shaking off the thought. He crouched down and bent his legs, holding his position firmly. The kits copied. Silverkit's rump was still in the air and Squirrelkit's tail stuck out. "Squirrelkit, lower your rump, you look like a duck."

"Ha! Mine's better!" said Squirrelkit.

"And Squirrelkit, lower your tail—it's as straight as a stick and it won't do you any good if it stands out like that," added Icepaw.

"See, you're not all that great!" teased Silverkit.

Icepaw nodded to the two apprentices as they looked at each other and playfully growled. "Okay, settle down. Next, do what I do." Icepaw crouched down low onto his belly fur, and balanced his tail right above the ground so it wouldn't drag or it wouldn't show too high. He flattened his ears and then after counting down a few heartbeats, he pounced. Silverkit and Squirrelkit gasped with amazement.

"That's so cool!" exclaimed Silverkit.

She positioned her tail somewhat like Icepaw's tail, and crouched down low. She didn't go that low but she went low enough. She also flattened her furry ears, and leaped almost immediately. Squirrelkit did the same.

Icepaw sat down and began washing his paws. "Hmm, that isn't half bad," he praised. The two kits brightened up.

Skypelt padded out of the nursery. "Squirrelkit, Silverkit, come here," he called.

"I think Ripplefur wants you both. Go," Icepaw told them.

The kits nodded and began to run towards the nursery eagerly. Icepaw watched them, and his head turned up to Skypelt. The large, young white-coated warrior dipped his head in gratitude before going back into the nursery.

From behind Icepaw, he felt Dawnpaw padding up. "Hey," she meowed. "I didn't know you were good with kits."

Icepaw ducked his head in embarrassment. "Silverkit and Squirrelkit are fond of every cat they see."

Dewpaw trotted up to his brother. "Particularly you," said the MoonClan apprentice. "Silverkit looks up to you in some kind of way. I can't explain it."

Dawnpaw snickered. "What if Silverkit likes Icepaw?" she asked.

Icepaw sighed. "Silverkit is barely a moon old, so we don't need to gossip about her," he said to her defense. "And plus, she doesn't look at me like that. She said when I am a warrior she wants me as her mentor. What apprentice falls in love with their mentor?"

"I was joking," said Dawnpaw. "I'm sure Dewpaw was joking too. Right, Dewpaw?" Icepaw's brother shook his head and his whiskers twitched.

"So what do you want?" asked Icepaw.

"Well, all the apprentices in camp are going to train at the hollow," explained Dewpaw. "We came so we could take you with us."

"Oh," said Icepaw. "Well, count me in then. How about Sweetpaw?"

"Of course she's coming!" said Dawnpaw eagerly. "Vinetail said it was good for Sweetpaw since she can learn to protect herself and take a break from all those herbs for once!"

Icepaw nodded and looked to the camp entrance. Ashtail, Mousetail, Adderclaw, Fireshade, Sweetpaw and Volepaw waited. "With all of us here we look like a battle patrol," commented

Icepaw. Dawnpaw meowed an agreement as they headed to the patrol.

"You finally came," said Adderclaw.

Icepaw nodded. "I'm here. We should go now."

* * *

Icepaw trotted into the Training Hollow eagerly with Volepaw and Dewpaw at his sides. Ashtail padded right behind him, Sweetpaw nervously beside Dawnpaw. Icepaw loved to come to the training hollow. Sweetpaw sighed and padded to the back of the hollow, sitting down and neatly wrapping her tail around her paws. Dawnpaw ran up to her mentor, Fireshade. Ashtail went by Icepaw, and Volepaw's mentor Adderclaw sat by his apprentice. Mousetail and Dewpaw sat together. Sweetpaw paitently watched.

"We are going to start off by learning how to weaken the enemy," said Mousetail, right beside his apprentice. They sat in a circle, Volepaw and his mentor across from him, Dawnpaw and her mentor across from Dewpaw.

"How are we gonna do it?" asked Adderclaw.

"I think we should start with something simple," said Ashtail, standing up. "How about a front paw strike—" his claws unsheathed and raked the air "—and then a back kick in case we are snuck up from behind?"

"I kind of wanted to teach them how to partner fight," said Mousetail.

"We have time for a lot of things," said Fireshade. "It's sunhigh right now. We can practice till' it's time for Sweetpaw to head off."

Sweetpaw sighed. "I should be in the medicine den right now," she muttered, loud enough for everyone to hear. Icepaw tried to hide his amusement, and so did Dewpaw.

"Sweetpaw," Adderclaw said. "Why don't you choose what battle move we should do first?" He looked over to the medicine cat

apprentice.

Sweetpaw ducked her head in embarrassment. "I-I don't know the types of battle moves you can do! It's the same thing as you all not knowing which herb is which and what they do to heal cats."

"Well, fine," Adderclaw said. He thought for a moment and then his tail raised. He had an idea. "We could probably do everything at once, ya' know?" Mousetail tilted his head in confusion. "We can stay back-to-back, partner fighting, keeping each other's tail's safe." He padded over to Ashtail.

"I guess we can," said Ashtail, as they both lined their hind quarters together. "And we fight off cats by doing our front paw strikes! If we get seperated, then we might as well do a back kick to keep our tails protected!"

"Perfect idea!" said Dawnpaw. Icepaw nodded in agreement.

"Okay, so here's how we will do it . . . Sweetpaw, come over here!" said Fireshade. Sweetpaw sighed and stood up, slowly walking over to the circle. "The apprentices can practice their front paw blows on the fake cats—err, *moss* over there, claws unsheathed. When they get it perfect, they line up with their mentor, and then other cats come and try to attack. We will use our front paw strike as a defense, right? But this time we will do it with our claws sheathed."

"Right!" said Mousetail.

"I don't have a warrior mentor," said Sweetpaw. "I am a medicine cat apprentice. Plus, this is a waste of moss." The last part of her statement was barely above a low growl.

Fireshade sighed. "You can partner up with Dawnpaw. I'll be an attacker and I'll watch you all as well to monitor how well you are working with your partner."

"Okay!" said Dawnpaw eagerly.

"When we get this done, can we do the upright lock?" asked Icepaw. "I heard it was a good one. Hard, too!"

"Well . . ." began Adderclaw. "I prefer we save it for last. It is a finishing move. First, since you are all smaller than us, I wanted to perfect your leap-and-hold's."

"Fine," sighed Icepaw.

Fireshade nodded. "It's settled then!" he declared. "Three, two, one, go!"

All the apprentices raced towards the moss hanging on the twigs and branches over-head. Icepaw's claws unsheathed, and he raked the moss hard with his front paw strike. The moss fell back down and he hit it again, adding more and more claw marks. He could hear Sweetpaw growl of frustration.

"Try to hit so that your blows do not strike the air," advised Fireshade. There was amusement behind his voice—Icepaw could hear it.

Sweetpaw nodded and steadied herself. She mightily brought down her claws and raked the moss in the air. Pieces flew off and marked into her claws and she gasped with excitement. "I did it! Fireshade, I did it!"

"And now who was complaining that this was a waste of moss? You will *gratefully* thank me when you are defending yourself with *this* move that *I* taught you." Fireshade sat down and licked his chest. Sweetpaw ducked down in embarrassment.

She turned to Dawnpaw. "I-I'm ready," she said with a sigh. Dawnpaw nodded, and they rested, hindquarters lining up. A perfect back-to-back partner fight position.

Ashtail ran up. "Icepaw! Help me take out Dawnpaw and Sweetpaw! I'll get Dawnpaw since she is more experienced and you get Sweetpaw!"

Icepaw nodded. "Got it!"

He leaped from his position and sheathed his claws so he won't hurt the medicine cat apprentice. Then, he ran up to her and growled. Sweetpaw looked frightened for a moment, but then she swiped and

her blow hit the air.

"That's right!" encouraged Icepaw. "That's how you have to keep me away, got it?"

Sweetpaw nodded and took a deep breath.

Growling with a false rage, Icepaw leaped up to Sweetpaw, who pushed him back again with her front paw strike, claws sheathed. Icepaw mentally praised the medicine cat apprentice's quick learning skills. He almost felt like she was a warrior apprentice rather than a medicine cat apprentice.

He leaped onto her and grabbed her neck with his front paws, and pushed her face to the ground. Sweetpaw yowled and threw him off. Dawnpaw turned to see what happened, but then Ashtail leaped right onto her. Dawnpaw gasped, but Sweetpaw swiftly pushed Ashtail off with all her might. She almost sent Icepaw's mentor flying.

"Wow!" said Ashtail with a small groan of pain. "I didn't know medicine cats had that much strength."

Dawnpaw stopped fighting and began to pant. Volepaw, Dewpaw, Adderclaw and Mousetail stopped fighting from the other side of the training hollow. Fireshade looked proud.

"Medicine cats are the strongest sources of a Clan," Fireshade said, looking warmly over to Sweetpaw. "Vinetail is my father's brother. Sedgetooth would always tell me how strong Vinetail is. How much energy he gives up to keep his Clan healthy and fed and protected. That's why being the medicine cat can be the hardest job yet, too."

"That's right," said Sweetpaw with pride.

Mousetail nodded. "You should lend us all your strength, Sweetpaw," he said. "Then we'd be fighting stronger than badgers."

Icepaw smiled. *Is this just flatter or they are telling the truth?* he thought.

Dewpaw sighed. "We were, though, all of us, pretty good with the

back-to-back partner fighting and our front paw strikes. We all knocked the moss off of where it hung overhead!"

"True," said Adderclaw. "You were all good."

"But Dawnpaw," said Ashtail. "When you saw I was just about to attack you, you turned to your sister to see if she needed help. If Sweetpaw couldn't escape Icepaw's grasp, and this was a real battle, you'd be crow-food by now!"

"It won't happen again," promised Dawnpaw.

Volepaw nudged Adderclaw. "Can we please do the upright lock now? All the apprentices were dying to do it!"

Adderclaw shook his head. "Fireshade explained the plan," he replied. "First, we were going to learn the leap-and-hold. It was deployed to great effect a few moons ago and it was created by the cats from none other than MoonClan. So it's basically a new move that only *we* know." His tail swished in pride.

Fireshade nodded and walked into the middle of the clearing. He turned to all of the apprentices. "Go back there," he ordered. "Warriors, lets show them how it's done."

Icepaw nodded and padded to the back of the den besides Dewpaw. His brother looked as eager as he did the first time the two left camp together for the official first time. They sat in the shade at the back of the clearing, and watched closely as the biggest—Adderclaw—stood in the middle of Mousetail, Ashtail and Fireshade.

Ashtail looked back over to the apprentices. "This move is ideal for a small cat facing a larger opponent. Spring onto his back and grip with unsheathed claws. It's good because you're beyond the range of your opponent's paws and in position to inflict severe wounds."

"Just make sure he doesn't throw you off!" added Fireshade. "Ah, that happened to me before . . . It really hurt, you know?"

Ashtail laughed. "I remember that time, Fireshade. But also watch for the drop-and-roll countermove, and try to jump free before you

get squashed. It's good for a group of cats, mainly apprentices, since it'll help you defeat your enemy fast. It's good partner practice too," he added with a look to Mousetail. "So here we can show you how to do it, and if it is done to you, we will show you how to avoid getting injured in this move."

"This seems cool," whispered Dewpaw to Icepaw.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Shh."

They both looked forward. Adderclaw was looking back and fourth to the two cats to his two sides. He seemed—or pretended to be—unaware of Mousetail, who crept up from behind. Icepaw's heart pounded faster as he watched the three cats hiss with rage. Eagerness swept through his body as he saw Mousetail quietly stalk close enough to leap. Finally, without making a sound, pushed off the ground with the strength in his back paws. It was the most perfect leap Icepaw has ever seen!

Mousetail landed right on top of Adderclaw's back. Icepaw gasped as he watched it happen. Adderclaw was spitting and hissing with fake rage as he tried to throw the other warrior off of his back. Ashtail crouched down and grabbed Adderclaw's paws, securing him while Fireshade watched out for enemies to come.

Adderclaw nodded and Mousetail climbed off of his back, Ashtail let him free of security. Fireshade looked back to them, and saw that their demonstration was done. He turned to the amazed apprentices. "That is how it is done."

"That was so cool!" exclaimed Icepaw. "Can you show us the counterattack?"

"With pleasure," said Mousetail, backing up again. They got into their previous positions once more. Now their 'ally' was supposedly Adderclaw.

Adderclaw was surrounded by the three cats again. Mousetail unexpectedly crept up from behind, while Ashtail and Fireshade distracted him. Then, he finally leaped onto Adderclaw's back. Mousetail's claws unsheathed to hold on tight, and Adderclaw

yowled with pain. Ashtail grabbed his paws and secured him again, but Adderclaw broke free in time.

He leaped off of the ground, and turned to he could land on his back. When he landed, Mousetail grunted in pain of being squashed by the large warrior. Quickly, Adderclaw got up before he could really hurt Mousetail. He helped the older warrior up onto his paws.

"That felt . . . quite nice . . ." commented Mousetail sarcastically.

"That looked quite *cool*," said Volepaw. "Can we try it now?"

"Sure," said Fireshade. "Sweetpaw doesn't have to do this---I don't think she will ever be part of an apprentice fighting group."

"Thank StarClan," she said, resting down onto her belly.

"Mousetail and Adderclaw had enough too, so they can rest. Ashtail, you can help me position the apprentices so they can get it perfectly," continued Fireshade. Ashtail nodded and walked up, stretching his back on his way. Icepaw swore he could hear a loud crack in his spine as he did. "I will be in the middle," explained Fireshade.

He padded in between Dawnpaw, Dewpaw, Volepaw and Icepaw. Icepaw was in the back. He figured that he was the one who would be doing the leaping and the 'getting squashed part.' He sighed. Poor him.

Ashtail walked all around the formation. Volepaw was right in front of Fireshade, and Dewpaw and Dawnpaw were on either side of him. He nodded, looking satisfied. "Dewpaw, you'd be better leaping and catching Fireshade by facing him," he said.

Dewpaw sighed and turned a notch to face Dawnpaw's mentor.

Fireshade nodded. "We are ready," he said. "Great StarClan . . . this will hurt!"

Dewpaw narrowed his eyes eagerly and his rump wiggled. Icepaw crouched down low. Ashtail looked at the formation and nodded. "Perfect! Ready, set, go!"

Immedietly, Dewpaw leaped right on to Fireshade's paws and held him down. "No way you are going anywhere, DarkClan warrior!" spat Icepaw's brother. Dawnpaw and Volepaw headed for Fireshade as well. Volepaw leaped right over Fireshade's head, covering his eyes with his plump belly, hissing.

Icepaw stared for a moment. Fireshade was being held down and batted on the head by the apprentices. He was nervous to leap onto Fireshade. What if he hurt his Clanmate? The apprentices were more brutal than the warriors with this move—his heart pounded.

Ashtail caught his eye. He saw that the apprentice wasn't moving. "Go!" he said. "Quick, before Fireshade escapes!"

Icepaw sighed and decided it was just training. He made sure his claws were sheathed before he pushed off the ground and leaped right onto the warrior's back. Fireshade yowled with anger just as Icepaw clung on hard. He felt his claws tear at Fireshade's fur, and Icepaw's eyes widened.

Oh no! But as he looked closer, his clumsy grip has only taken fur off of the warrior. Fireshade, with all his might, leaped out of the group of apprentice's circle with Icepaw clinging hard onto his back. His paws were just about to touch the ground.

Great StarClan, Icepaw, leap already!

Icepaw let go of Fireshade and stumbled off his back before he landed. Fireshade landed right on his side. That must've hurt! Quickly, he scrambled up and ran to the MoonClan warrior.

"Fireshade! I'm so sorry!" he quickly said, his heart racing. "I-I didn't mean to hurt you!"

Fireshade staggered up, gasping. "Hurt me?" he asked. "That was awesome! You leaped right off my back before I crushed you. Genius, Icepaw!"

Icepaw felt relieved. "I did what you showed us," he said with embarrassment.

"You did a good job nonetheless. And I guess we're all tired now,"

announced Ashtail. "Who wants to go back to camp and call it a day?"

"Me!" said Fireshade immedietly. "All that struggling made me hungry."

"I need to finish sorting herbs before going to the Night Flower! I *was* doing that until I was put in the training patrol," said Sweetpaw. "Can we go back now?" She looked pleadingly up to the mentors.

"Sure," said Mousetail, stretching his old bones as he walked over.

Volepaw sighed. "But I thought we were going to learn the upright lock," he sulked.

"We practiced a lot in one day," pointed out Mousetail. "I want to go back to rest and eat."

Icepaw's stomach rumbled even though he wasn't suppose to eat anymore today since he already had his fill. He should've waited for the end of the day to eat. The cold black bird seemed delicious right about now.

"Let's get back to camp," he said.

Chapter Nine

Edited ✔

Wow! Another long chapter! The book is going on so fine ^_^ thanks for all the support, once agin. And please let me know of any typos, name mix-ups, and grammar mistakes. I tend to do those a lot . Comment, vote, share !

The moon shone brilliantly over the trees as Icepaw followed Shadowheart, Rainwhisker, Featherbreeze and Ashtail through the cold forest. The red and orange leaves crunched underpaw in the softest way as they walked. Icepaw was on the extra border patrol to DarkClan's territory just to scout and remark their side of the territory.

Everyone was silent. Icepaw's muscles could show under his dark gray pelt, aching to take action. They were close to the border now —Icepaw could smell it. He began to run ahead, eager to see what he would find, but Ashtail stopped him before he could even get there. Icepaw skidded to a halt.

"Shh," his mentor scolded. "Careful, cause there could be DarkClan cats lurking anywhere."

Icepaw nodded. "Sorry, Ashtail," he apologized. He looked over his mentor's broad shoulders, and could see the usual scent-line where they would mark.

Shadowheart turned to face his patrol. "Now, be very careful," he said. "I will go with Rainwhisker and Featherbreeze to mark on that side. Ashtail, Icepaw, you'll be together to scout the area. Just don't stray to far from us." He turned to Featherbreeze and Rainwhisker.

"You be careful," whispered Featherbreeze to her son.

Icepaw nodded to his mother. "You too," he meowed. She turned to Shadowheart and Rainwhisker, nodding. It must be a sign that she

was ready. The three cats quietly walked to the trees where they were suppose to start the markers, and disappeared behind bushes near the borders.

Ashtail looked down to Icepaw. "Tell me what you smell," he said as soon as they were gone. His voice was low. No cat except the patrol knew they were there, if there were any DarkClan cats around.

Icepaw opened his jaws. He tasted the cold, leaf fall air, slowly turning his head from one tree to another. He could smell scent-markers. But every cat could smell that. He concentrated deeper. "I can smell . . . mouse." His Boyce was low.

Ashtail shook his head. "We're not here hunting for prey. Look deeper, find any stale or fresh cat scents," he said.

Icepaw nodded. He began to smell the air again. Just as Ashtail said, he did smell cats! "I smell stale"—he looked deep into the scent, and realized that it was Icepaw's and Flamepaw's old scent when they met together that night! He looked to his mentor —"border patrol scents."

Ashtail sighed. "Let's look deeper," he murmured, crouching down low on the ground. Icepaw imitated him, and some of his belly fur touched the cool dirt of the forest. He slowly crept after the MoonClan warrior, eager to see if they find anything or any useful information. He was also relieved that Ashtail wasn't suspicious about those 'border patrol scents.'

He followed Ashtail to a nearby oak tree. It was really big, and seemed to be made out of thick layers of wood. Ashtail's mouth opened and he tasted the air carefully, closing his eyes. Icepaw did the same, but kept his eyes opened since he wasn't use to what Ashtail was doing. He searched around.

Ashtail grunted of frustration. "We have to go closer to the borders," he said. "I can't smell anything, and if we leave without scouting the whole area it won't be considered a full border patrol."

Icepaw nodded. "Lead on," he said with his voice still low.

Ashtail slowly walked into the undergrowth. He didn't make a pawstep sound—Icepaw was impressed! He lightly let his paws touch the ground when he walked, just as Ashtail did. He wanted to be as stealthy as his mentor.

Icepaw opened his jaws and sniffed the air again. Now what did he smell? It smelled awfully gross. DarkClan warrior stench. Icepaw gasped and looked to his mentor. Ashtail nodded and flicked his tail, a sign that either meant stick close, or *shhh!*

They slowly walked, quiet and stealthy. Icepaw looked over the DarkClan borders. He could see eyes flashing. There was someone there!

Icepaw looked up at Ashtail again. "What do we do? They're looking at the patrol! What if they attack?" he asked.

"Hush!" hushed Ashtail. His gaze narrowed. For a moment, Icepaw caught Shadowheart's eye. He pointed upwards with his tail—a signal that there was someone close by. It seemed that Shadowheart understood! Icepaw felt pride in his pelt for a moment as Shadowheart murmured to Featherbreeze and Rainwhisker.

"Well done," whispered Ashtail to Icepaw. "We need to move a tiny bit closer to hear something. If they're saying anything, any information will be useful."

Icepaw nodded and moved right to his mentor's side. What if a fight broke out? Both excitement and fear rippled through his body. He slowly moved forward, little pawstep by little pawstep, making sure he made no noise.

Ashtail stopped Icepaw with his tail. "We're close enough," he informed. "Listen."

Icepaw nodded and pricked his ears forward. Maybe all that battle training he had a few days ago was worth it? It had to be! He felt like he knew a lot of moves now. Icepaw felt powerful. His heart stopped when he heard voices.

I can hear them! thought Icepaw. *Maybe I will be able to actually hear*

words, though . . .

Icepaw concentrated hard on the muffled voices. Finally, he could make out their words. "—there are only three of them, so they'll heavily be outnumbered," said a deep voice. Icepaw recognized the voice of Whiteleap, from the gathering. Sandstar's deputy.

"So where will we come from?" asked a she-cat.

Whiteleap was silent for a moment. "Deathfang, you will pretend to lead a border patrol," the deputy finally said. "Take two warriors with you."

"I want Pierceleaf and Blackheart," the she-cat said again. "What's next?"

"You'll be regular patrol cats that randomly see another MoonClan patrol. You'll be marking our borders. Got it?" said Whiteleap. "Then, when the patrol is ahead of your patrol, you attack those three cats from behind. Beetlepaw and I will be a sort of backup."

Icepaw's eyes widened. *That's just like us!* he thought. *Five cats, three patrolling, two in hiding. And isn't that Beetlepaw kit the new DarkClan apprentice?*

"A-are you sure I won't get hurt?" whimpered Beetlepaw. "I mean . . . will I fight?"

Whiteleap sneared. "You pathetic excuse for an apprentice," he growled. "I wondered why Sandstar made me take you with me. You've slowed us down this entire trip."

"I am sorry," Beetlepaw said. "I am ready to attack. Good luck, Deathfang, Pierceleaf and Blackheart."

"We don't need luck," hissed Deathfang. "We win by sheer strength. This patrol will be . . . gone quicker than a rabbit-chase."

Icepaw's eyes widened. Didn't that mean they were going to attempt to kill cats on the MoonClan patrol? He looked over to Shadowheart, Featherbreeze and Rainwhisker. They were regularly marking their borders. What have they ever done to DarkClan?

Icepaw looked up to Ashtail. He knew he had to fight.

Ashtail sighed. "Here's the plan. As soon as the DarkClan *patrol* attacks, we attack. I bet the other two cats will come after that, so I expect you to fight that new apprentice. I will handle the grown cats."

Icepaw nodded. "Okay."

I will definelty fight, won't I? At least it will be an easy opponent. Beetlepaw became an apprentice a quartermoon ago, I think. And he's small. I have to win this battle!

They waited.

Finally, the DarkClan patrol emerged from the bush. Two cats followed the one she-cat, as if they were just going to mark borders. She narrowed her eyes. " . . . Shadowheart," she meowed.

"Deathfang," said Shadowheart with a dip of his head. Icepaw couldn't clearly see them. The bushes and leaves and undergrowth that covered Icepaw also covered whatever he tried to see. The two patrols turned back to their own sides of the territory.

Icepaw's eyes narrowed to slits. The DarkClan deputy was waiting in the bush, their eyes glowing softly under the moonlight. Icepaw realized that this would be his first fight. He wished that his brother was here by his side so that they could attack together. Dewpaw might be upset at the news, but it couldn't be helped.

"Get ready," murmured Ashtail under his breath. "It's almost time. . . ."

The two patrols passed each other—the MoonClan cats seemed uneasy, with their fur bristling and eyes watching the other three cats with discomfort. They began to pass each other, until they were back-to-back. They couldn't see what the other patrol was doing at this point, until the three DarkClan cats spun around. *It's their chance!* With soft paws, the three cats leaped from their positions. Deathfang landed right on top of Shadowheart. He yowled with surprise, and tried to turn to her, hissing.

A dark gray tom with deep amber eyes landed right by Icepaw's mother, his claw hooked to her neck. She yowled in pain, and immediately, without stopping himself, Icepaw darted from his spot to get to his mother's side. Rainwhisker was pinned down by a black and white tom.

Icepaw ran to Featherbreeze and used all his might to push the gray tom off of her. She got up, recovering fast. "Thank you," she said. "Let me handle this battle!"

"No, look!" gasped Icepaw. He pointed with his tail as Whiteleap and Beetlepaw charged out from under their bush on their side of the border.

Ashtail had just gotten to Icepaw's side as soon as the two reached the fighting cats. Rainleap fought the black and white tom, Featherbreeze with the gray one, and Shadowheart with Deathfang. Icepaw eyed Beetlepaw.

"Go! Get the apprentice!" ordered the deputy to Beetlepaw.

"Yes, Whiteleap!" growled Beetlepaw, who charged to Icepaw. Whiteleap and Ashtail clashed in the corner of his eye.

Beetlepaw and Icepaw stopped right in front of each other, growling. Beetlepaw has grown a bit. His fur bristled and fluffed up a lot, his thorny sharp claws unsheathed. He hissed at Icepaw. "Don't think you can beat me!" Beetlepaw threatened.

"I can think what I want!" growled Icepaw, leaping over to the young apprentice. Immediately, he leaped out of the way, out of Icepaw's grasp. For a small apprentice, he was fast. Icepaw's smirk widened, knowing that this fight would be fair. It would feel rather uncomfortable if Beetlepaw were no match for Icepaw.

This time, Beetlepaw ran up from Icepaw's rear and pushed him down with his paws. Icepaw let him. He wasn't playing with him but Icepaw wanted to kick the DarkClan apprentice over, just to see the look on his face.

Beetlepaw growled of satisfaction as he struggled to get Icepaw on

his back. "Ha!" he yowled. "Don't underestimate me!"

With claws peircing painfully into Icepaw's shoulder's to keep him down, Beetlepaw tried to snap a killing bite to Icepaw's neck. Icepaw avoided the apprentice's teeth, and raked his hindclaws over his soft belly fur. Beetlepaw yowled with pain, and let go a bit. Icepaw kicked him over, flipping the small apprentice.

Icepaw scrambled up, and looked at Beetlepaw, who was on his back. But quickly, he got up too. This fight might be harder than Icepaw thought . . .

The two ran back to each other and slammed into one another, wrestling to the ground. Icepaw tried hard to scratch the apprentice on the face. He scraped his claws on the nose of Beetlepaw and he yowled in pain, just as Beetlepaw's jaws met Icepaw's left ear.

Beetlepaw bit down hard, and it *hurt*! Icepaw managed to push Beetlepaw off again. He growled under his breath. Beetlepaw leaped and grabbed onto Icepaw's back, and he struggled for a moment but then quickly remembered the training from a few days ago. He had to leap!

With much force, Icepaw leaped as hard as he could hard since he had the extra weight on his back. He twisted in midair so his belly faced the moon and his back faced the forest floor. He landed roughly, crushing the apprentice, causing Beetlepaw to gasp hard. The wind must've been knocked out of him. Quickly, Icepaw got up, panting. Beetlepaw breathed heavily for a moment, but then stopped.

Icepaw's eyes narrowed. "How old are you, kit?"

"I-I'm the regular apprentice age!" spat Beetlepaw. "Four moons old!"

Icepaw narrowed his eyes. *Four moons old! I have to tell Brightstar.* "Go back to your camp. Battles are not for kits!" he growled, showing his claws to Beetlepaw.

The kit's eyes widened with fear and then scrambled up to his paws,

racing back to the DarkClan borders. Icepaw sighed and took a second to breath, then looked back to the battle. Rainwhisker seemed to be handeling his fight pretty well, and as was Featherbreeze. Ashtail and Shadowheart were not.

They were both loosing. It was obvious by how much they struggled. As fast as he could, Icepaw ran to Shadowheart's aid. He was fighting against Deathfang—a tough she-cat. She was right on top of Shadowheart. It was almost hard to tell for a second because she had the same colored pelt he did—black, with amber eyes too. But they had different statures and her tail was more feathered than his, separating their differences.

Icepaw rushes over and shoved Deathfang off of Shadowheart with his shoulder. His Clanmate stared at Icepaw for a second, his eyes wide with adrenaline and a fierce fighting power. He nodded to Icepaw, and together, the two leaped at Deathfang, hissing and growling. Deathfang growled to herself and looked over the border.

"You were lucky this time, Shadowheart!" she screeched, before running off.

Shadowheart smirked. "We scared her off!" he said with pride. "You never see that from a DarkClan warrior every day!"

"Yeah!" Icepaw agreed triumphantly.

Featherbreeze looked as if she was winning the fight with the tom who has attacked her. He also ran over the border, retreating after his two Clanmates. Shadowheart went to go help Rainwhisker with his fight, and Icepaw looked over to Ashtail, being pinned down by the DarkClan deputy with great force. His claws were in Ashtail's neck, and Icepaw gasped, realizing that Ashtail was merely holding off so the tom couldn't sink in deeper.

His mentor wasn't even yowling in pain. He only grunted as his legs were slowly giving off.

"Don't make me hurt you!" spat Ashtail.

Icepaw was frozen in his spot.

"You? Hurt *me*?" growled Whiteleap. "Impossible, in your position!"

Ashtail pushed up far so his head was just in sight of the moon and the stars. But suddenly, his eyes glinted brightly, *very* brightly into Whiteleap's eyes. Ashtail had used MoonClan's ability on him!

Whiteleap let go and staggered back. "Re-retreat!" yowled the deputy. The cat who was fighting Rainwhisker backed off, hissing. "We are not beaten, MoonClan! You were lucky!"

Ashtail watched them run off with pride. His scratches were clearly visible on his body, and they looked like they stung. Icepaw merely had bite marks on his ear--every other things Beetlepaw intended to do to hurt Icepaw hadn't really effected him.

Featherbreeze ran up, sniffing him all over. "Oh, my kit . . . are you okay?" she asked worridely.

"Yes, I'm fine," said Icepaw. "I'm an apprentice. You knew I was going to have a battle one day."

"This was not a battle," grunted Rainwhisker. "Battles are far worse than a mere fight of two patrols." He looked over the DarkClan border, his eyes flashing with hatred. "Those cats are always picking fights."

Shadowheart nodded. Icepaw opened his mouth, about to mention the four moon old apprentice, Beetlepaw, but she shut his mouth again and decided to save it for Brightstar. There could still be cats lurking around. Besides, he didn't want to endanger his Clanmates with mere knowledge.

"L-let's get back," murmured Icepaw.

Shadowheart nodded of an agreement. "We must report to Brightstar of today's victory."

A sneer sounded in the bushes. "Victory?" the voice said. "DarkClan, attack!"

Icepaw's eyes widened and he looked over the border. A large number of warriors poured out of the bushes, hissing and yowling.

Beetlepaw came out running again, right besides another apprentice, who seemed to be about six moons old. His ears flattened.

"Shadowheart!" hissed Ashtail.

Icepaw looked over to his mentor. His eyes were round with worry. Shadowheart growled. "Hold your ground!" he ordered. "Any injured cats, signal me and we will retreat!"

"You're telling me we have to fight?" yowled Featherbreeze. She looked over to her son, who only knew a moon's training. "Icepaw . . ."

"If Shadowheart says so, I will fight!" he declared.

Just as he finished his sentence, the Clans clashed. DarkClan warriors flooded over MoonClan's borders, hissing with rage, Sandstar in the lead. Right in the distance, Icepaw could see Flamepaw. He didn't want to fight his friend! He decided to keep his distance so he didn't have to do anything to hurt the other apprentice.

He began to run around the small crowd of fighting cats, and ran right into Beetlepaw once more. The under-aged apprentice hissed with rage. "Now I will get my revenge!" he spat.

Another DarkClan apprentice, the same one that he saw, charged forward and leaped hard onto Icepaw, claws seeping in deep into his pelt. Icepaw yowled with agony and managed to kick off the brutal cat. He turned and hissed with rage. Beetlepaw and the apprentice were coming back!

They leaped on top of him again, biting and scratching him all over. *Oh StarClan, help!* thought Icepaw. *I can't fight them both off!* He shut his eyes tight, knowing that he can't do anything anymore. But then the weight was removed. His eyes opened once more, happy to see Ashtail standing over him, spitting with rage at the other two apprentices. They backed down from Ashtail's large size.

Icepaw scrambled up. "Thank you!"

Ashtail nodded. "We will start back-to-back fighting, just like at training. Icepaw, come on!" his mentor ordered. Icepaw nodded and stepped right in front of Ashtail, now feeling ready for anything. A DarkClan warrior she-cat—a small one at that—ran right up to him.

Icepaw hissed with rage, and brought his paws hard onto the she-cat's head, and scratched down her face. She yowled with pain, and then retreated, unable to see. Icepaw smiled to himself. *I did it, and that was easy!*

But then he realized that more cats were coming. This time, two full-grown DarkClan warriors. Icepaw wanted to shrink back with fear, but he only stood taller, prepared for anything. Behind him, Ashtail yowled with pain.

Icepaw turned quickly, and saw his mentor collapsed onto the floor. "No!" he yowled, as a warrior brought up his paw, about to strike.

He knocked down the DarkClan warrior, and quickly helped Ashtail up. Icepaw searched his mentor's gaze. "We have to go find Shadowheart! We must retreat!" Ashtail looked like he couldn't fight anymore. It was true, he was leaning onto his apprentice with most his weight.

"I-Icepaw . . . look out!" managed the MoonClan warrior.

Quickly, Icepaw turned. The two cats who were charging at him leaped. Icepaw held his breath, but he couldn't just let Ashtail go! Suddenly, another cat leaped right in front of Icepaw. It was his mother, Featherbreeze! The two warriors caught her instead, and one held her, pinned down to the ground, and before Icepaw could react, the other bit down into her neck hard.

She screeched with pain, and kicked the cat pinning her down with her back claws. It raked the cat deep in the neck, and she fell dead to the floor. The cat biting into Featherbreeze's neck did not let go, though, to see her dead Clanmate. She bit harder until Featherbreeze stopped moving in her jaws.

Icepaw's heart stopped. Featherbreeze was dead.

Icepaw yowled with horror, and Shadowheart looked over to Icepaw. He saw Featherbreeze's body, Ashtail's struggling, and it looked as if he were growling to himself.

"Retreat!" he yowled. "MoonClan, retreat!"

"C-come on Ashtail! Walk! I have to get Featherbreeze!" Icepaw said to his mentor.

Ashtail limped over to Rainwhisker and leaned on him this time. As fast as they could, they began to run away to the best of their ability. Shadowheart grabbed Featherbreeze's scruff and began to drag her away, Icepaw helped. As fast as they could, they retreated from the battle sight.

The DarkClan warriors began to cheer in the background. Icepaw's heart pierced with sadness. Their victory costed his mother's death. He wanted to stop moving at all, and join her with StarClan right now. He couldn't bear the grief in his heart.

Wait until he told Dewpaw, or Sparrowheart! His heart was cruched as he imagined their grief. His heart was crushed by his own grief alone. . . .

His whole body stung with pain. Shadowheart and Icepaw slowed down once they were away from the large group of DarkClan cats. They weren't close to camp, but far enough from the danger. Icepaw stopped in his tracks, panting.

Shadowheart looked down to Icepaw. "I'm sorry . . ." he murmured. It was the first thing he had said since they retreated. "It's my fault. I should of retreated earlier, when I realized we were badly outnumbered."

Icepaw slowly looked up to Shadowheart. "Sorry?" he asked, his voice low. "Sorry wont bring back Featherbreeze! She is dead because of your stupid mistake, Shadowheart!" He was growling. Icepaw meant all of his words.

Shadowheart's eyes widened with surprise. "I-I . . . I deserve whatever you are about to say . . ."

"You're the worst patrol leader in MoonClan's history, letting Clanmates die and get hurt like that! Your stupid mistake won't be enough that I will forgive you since you said *sorry*!" continued Icepaw. He was getting a little better by saying all of this.

Rainwhisker and Ashtail were slowly padding by. Shadowheat's gaze slunk to his paws, and his eyes saddened with grief as well, but not as much as Icepaw's. Icepaw was raging with grief and anger right now. *Why did Featherbreeze have to die?*

Rainwhisker touched his tail to Shadowheart's back, Ashtail still leaning a little on him. "Don't worry. I'm sure Icepaw doesn't mean it. He is only grieving."

Shadowheart slowly nodded.

"I meant all of it!" spat Icepaw, storming away in the direction of camp. Shadowheart's patrol began to follow him, trying to keep up with Icepaw's pace.

"—I didn't know an apprentice could hold so much anger," Rainwhisker whispered. "You'd best stay away from Icepaw. He's always been sweet. But now with Featherbreeze's death, who knows how he will change? And what about Dewpaw?"

The thing is, Dewpaw wasn't there to see our mother die before his eyes, thought Icepaw. *It's the worse feeling in the whole entire world!*

". . . I know . . ." murmured Shadowheart. "I will. But I will never stop feeling guilty."

Icepaw sneered. Ashtail grunted in pain as he kept walking. The sound of Featherbreeze's body being dragged was the loudest thing right now in the forest. Icepaw looked up to the sky, and could see that the sun was just below the trees. So much time had past since Icepaw left the camp.

The moon was nowhere in sight.

The camp entrance view, though, was just ahead. How will he walk in? With the same rage? Calmly and peacefully? His Clanmates would notice his grief and battle scratches—they will surely

question. But he already found himself walking through the entrance, scared.

Everyone was in camp, even the border patrol and the hunting patrol. It looks like they only found so little prey to stock the fresh-kill-pile.

"What happened?" gasped Dawnpaw, who already had gotten to Icepaw.

A few more warriors crowded up, including Dewpaw. Sparrowheart squeezed through the cats. He looked down to his son. "Icepaw . . . where is the rest of the patrol?" he asked. "Did something happen? I see scratches! Something must of happened!"

Just then, Shadowheart, Ashtail and Rainwhisker limped through the camp entrance. Brightstar and Icepaw padded slowly towards them. Featherbreeze's body was laid carefully right before the leader. Icepaw whimpered a little, holding back a wail of grief in his throat.

Rainwhisker stood up, since Icepaw was too sad to talk, Ashtail was too weak, and Shadowheart was too nervous. "DarkClan cats attacked us," he informed the leader. "At first, it was only a small group, and we easily beat them, and they retreated."

Brightstar was angry. "But what happened to Featherbreeze?" she demanded.

Rainwhisker sighed. "I was getting there . . ." he murmured. "We were surprise attacked by more DarkClan warrior—outnumbered by many. We fought, holding on as long as we could . . . and finally retreated until we saw Featherbreeze collapse, and Ashtail weaken."

He pointed with his nose to Ashtail, who was slowly nodding of agreement. Icepaw growled to himself softly, surprised that he didn't mention it was Shadowheart's idea to stay and fight. Icepaw wanted to but he kept shut, not wanting to start more problems at the same time.

"He looks horrible!" a cat whispered in the Clan. *Does he mean*

Ashtail or me?

Sparrowheart pushed through all the cats and ran up to his dead mate. "Featherbreeze!" he yowled. "No!" He collapsed by her side, and touched her nose to her warm fur, which was slowly cooling down. She was loosing all the heat in her. "No, Featherbreeze . . ."

Dewpaw walked up with horror, his eyes wide too. "Featherbreeze," he whimpered.

Icepaw touched his nose to his brother's pelt, and sighed sadly. "Featherbreeze died saving me," he whispered.

Sparrowheart looked up to Icepaw. "Really?" he asked. "Is that what she really did?" Icepaw nodded. Sparrowheart growled. "To whoever murdered her, I will kill them for hurting you and my mate!" His eyes blazed.

Brightstar sighed and looked over to her deputy, opening her mouth to say something. Vinetail walked over to her and cut her off before any words escaped. "Let him grieve. Sparrowheart really loved Fratherbreeze."

Brightstar nodded. "Yes, Vinetail." She pushed passed the group of cats, to the Moonrock. Icepaw remained by his mother's side, with Sparrowheart and Dewpaw. By the time every cat had murmured their respect, Brightstar called upon the Clan. "Every cat gather around!"

Icepaw didn't move, he only looked up. The whole Clan did the same, and turned to their leader.

"Today, we lost a great and noble warrior," she began. Her voice wavered, and Icepaw could tell how much she tried to stay strong. "DarkClan attacked, killing Featherbreeze and deeply injuring Ashtail. To those cats who battled DarkClan, report to Vinetail's den immediately to be treated of your wounds. The elders will come with me to prepare the spot we are going to bury Featherbreeze. Tonight, we will pay our respect for her journey to StarClan."

The Clan grew silent. Brightstar leaped off her den, met up by

Thrushclaw and Stripeeyes. Icepaw looked over to Ashtail, being guided by Rainwhisker to the medicine den. Both cats were injured. Shadowheart slowly walked over to the warrior's den, obviously not in the mood to see anyone. Icepaw felt the same way. He collapsed right onto his mother's body, burying his face into her fur.

Oh, Featherbreeze. Why did you have to go?

Chapter Ten

Edited ✔

Icepaw touched his nose to his mother's dead body. Featherbreeze's features stood out perfectly under the moonlight. Her brilliant light gray fur was as radiant as the stars. She was still as soft as he first felt it when he was kitted. *I will miss you, Featherbreeze.*

If only Shadowheart said we could retreat before the attack, you'd still be alive. He casted a look of hatred to Shadowheart. He was waiting to pay his respects to Featherbreeze, and so were other cats. Ripplefur was the second cat, because she had to come in and out of her den quickly to not spread the sickness. Spottedkit lay quiet and peaceful, deep in sleep in the nursery.

He looked over to her.

Ripplefur caught his eyes, and gave him a warm glance of sympathy. Icepaw sighed, ignoring it, and walked in another direction, away from every cat. A few were staring at him. Dewpaw and Sparrowheart were paying their respects to his mother now, and he knew they were not as sad as he. They never saw it happen.

Icepaw looked up to the sky, at Silverpelt. There were so many stars. . . he wondered which one could be Featherbreeze? He kept his gaze to where StarClan resided, until he felt a presence coming from behind him. Icepaw turned, to see Brightstar behind him.

"Icepaw," she greeted. "I must talk with you, if you may . . ."

Icepaw sighed, not wanting to talk to anyone. But she was MoonClan's leader. "Okay," replied Icepaw. At the same time, he wondered what she wanted to talk about.

"Follow me," ordered the leader softly, beginning to pad to her den. Icepaw realized that the white she-cat with gray stripes was watching what she was saying, not to sound too harsh or mean to

upset him. He appreciated that Brightstar was trying to be kind.

Icepaw reluctantly followed her into her den, wishing he were all alone in MoonClan territory right now. She sat onto her nest, and Icepaw sat near her. There was a short silence, until Icepaw broke the peace. "What is it, Brightstar?"

Brightstar sighed, and looked down to Icepaw. "According to Vinetail," she began, "Ashtail's wounds are severe. There's a chance he might never be mobile again, not for a long time."

Icepaw almost coughed and choked on his breath. "What?!" First, his mother, and now his mentor?

Brightstar licked Icepaw's ear. "I am sorry . . . you two are close, I know that," she said. "He's been there for you every day since you were an apprentice, and I tresure him too. He's a wonderful warrior of MoonClan. But Ashtail is in no shape to mentor you anymore."

Icepaw looked to the ground of her den and whimpered a little. "Not him too . . ." murmured Icepaw. "What about his kin?"

"He doesn't have close kin . . . so I figured the first cat to tell would be you," she said. "When he was an apprentice both his parents died. And he was born a single kit. The next cats to tell are his friends. I'm just hoping for the best for him."

Icepaw felt bitter. "Thank you for telling me." It was sad news indeed. "Who will be my new mentor?"

Brightstar sighed. "I don't know yet. Sparrowheart is in no condition to discuss about it yet, so your training will be shared by Adderclaw, Fireshade and Mousetail." She looked outside the den. "I've told them already."

"M-may I be excused?" he asked.

Brightstar nodded, and led Icepaw out of the den. As soon as he was out, he burst into a run, pushing past those in the way. He wanted to be alone. Icepaw dashed out of the entrance of the camp, and ran through MoonClan's forest, as fast as his paws could take him.

Icepaw wanted to yowl with grief. He wanted to grieve for his mother and mentor and even his friend, Ripplefur. Her and her kit being sick did not help his emotions. Behind him, he could see someone chasing him.

"Icepaw!" the voice yowled. It sounded like Volepaw. "Hey, Icepaw, come back!"

Icepaw turned, and noticed the pawsteps getting louder. He had to get out of here. He didn't want to be followed by anyone, especially his Clanmates right now. All he wanted to be is alone! Icepaw leapt onto a tree, and began to swiftly climb up. He hauled himself up a branch, using all the might of his forepaws. When he could reach, he used his backpaws to get up the rest of the way.

Volepaw stopped right below the tree root, confused. "What? Where did he go?" the apprentice wondered out loud. Icepaw didn't dare move.

Behind him, some other cat walked up. It was Shadowheart. This was more of a reason why Icepaw didn't go down. Shadowheart cast a quick glance up the tree, but then turned to Volepaw, sighing. "He's gone."

Volepaw sighed too. "C'mon, let's go tell Brightstar. It's not safe for Icepaw to be out at this time of day, especially alone!"

Shadowheart nodded of agreement, and they both began to trot back. Icepaw watched them. *Good riddance,* he thought. He sighed and looked up to the moon, a single crescent in the sky, which was at it's highest position.

Icepaw looked down from his thick branch, and decided not to travel by the forest floor. He leaped to the next branch on the tree he was on, and took a daring jump to the next oak. Icepaw held on to the branches hard with his sharp claws, hoping to StarClan that he doesn't fall.

Then, Icepaw traveled to the next branch, getting away from MoonClan faster and faster. Each leap he took, the thought of getting revenge grew more and more in his mind. He realized he

was going towards DarkClan's border. He must be at a good distance from his Clan now.

Slowly and cautiously, Icepaw climbed down from his tree, his paws aching a bit from all the leaping. But he wasn't done traveling yet. DarkClan was just ahead. Icepaw darted into the bushes, feeling like he heard something. He was right, two DarkClan cats walked by, most likely patrolling the area where his mother had died.

He wanted to leap out of the bush and tear those two cat's heads off, but he knew he stood no chance against them. Icepaw growled to himself a tiny bit, and preceded on, right over the DarkClan border. The moment he crossed the scent-line, his heart was pounding in his head.

A small voice spoke to him. *Don't do it, Icepaw!* it said. That voice sounded so familiar.

Oh, but I have to! I will avenge my mother, Featherbreeze. You did not *deserve to die! These stupid fox-hearted DarkClan cats should all die miserable and painful deaths!* the MoonClan apprentice thought.

Icepaw, this is not like you! that same voice said again. He realized it was the voice of a she-cat.

Icepaw shook his head from the thought, wanting to yell out loud to the voice: *But Featherbreeze is dead! She never deserved to die! Everything DarkClan did to MoonClan is against the warrior code!*

He stopped crouching from his spot in the undergrowth. He was running out of spaces to hide—he didn't know that DarkClan territory was so open. Icepaw made a run for it, not knowing for sure where he was really going. He wished that he knew his way around DarkClan territory like he did with MoonClan's.

DarkClan seemed endless.

Icepaw wanderer around for who knows long now. The moon was drowning down into the trees, and Icepaw really badly wanted to shut his eyes and sleep cozy in his nest again. MoonClan must be worried about him. Some part of him regretted charging out of his

Clan like that but most parts of him still wanted revenge.

It seemed strange to him though that he couldn't find the camp, or at least one cat at the very least.

This territory is huge! thought Icepaw. *What did they even attack us for? They've stolen some of our territory, some of our prey, but it looks like they don't need to.* The more Icepaw found out about DarkClan, the more confused he became.

He was thinking as he padded along, keeping completely to himself.

Flamepaw told him that DarkClan cats didn't know parts of the warrior code. DarkClan territory is like the size of two territories put into one, and just yesterday he fought an apprentice four moons old. Nothing was adding up.

Icepaw stopped for a moment to take a quick rest in the nearest bush he found. For the moment he was there, he decided that killing an experienced DarkClan warrior for revenge was too much to take for his small apprentice paws. Right now, the best he could do was find out more of DarkClan's secrets.

Icepaw took a deep breath before padding tiredly out of the bush again. His eyes longed for sleep and his paws longed for rest. As Icepaw walked on, a scent began to rise in his nose. A cat came close before he could react, and this cat definitely spotted him. Icepaw's claws unsheathed and he hissed.

"Who are you?" he demanded. The cat slowly padded over.

"Icepaw!" a familiar voice said. It was Flamepaw. "Why are you here? This is DarkClan territory!"

Icepaw snarled. "What? Are you going to kill me for trespassing, just like you killed my *mother*, for trespassing into MoonClan?"

Flamepaw flinched. "Wait . . . what?" he asked. "I don't know what you are talking about!"

Icepaw growled lower. "I overheard DarkClan cats saying that they were gonna fight to kill cats on the MoonClan patrol. And just when

we thought we won from being attacked on our own territory, more DarkClan cats came. My mentor was hurt, my mother was killed! You were there!"

Flamepaw shook his head. "I didn't touch any of your Clanmates," he said. "I was there, but I hid. I did not want to fight a pointless battle. And . . . sorry about your mentor. . . . especially your mother." He dipped his head in respect to the MoonClan apprentice.

Icepaw opened his mouth to respond, but then stopped himself there. How *could* he respond?

"Come on," said Flamepaw. "Some cat could come. I know a place where we could hide."

Icepaw nodded as Flamepaw turned and began to walk away. Somehow, he knew he could trust Flamepaw. He'd been so good to him so far, and he wasn't like his Clanmates. Maybe this is the only DarkClan cat Icepaw could trust. It was also a chance to get into the secrets of his Clan.

He took a deep breath and continued to follow Flamepaw. Soon, they ended right to a large tree that towered over the other trees. "C'mon, follow me up. It's another one of my secret places," Flamepaw said.

"Oh . . . okay," said Icepaw, leaping onto a tree branch. He hesitated before leaping on the branch after the DarkClan apprentice. He was lucky that there were no DarkClan warrior cats around, or he'd be in huge trouble. Perhaps there'd be a life-threatening situation, or he would escape to MoonClan with a whole bunch of killers following him to attack the heart of the Clan.

Flamepaw disappeared inside the leaves of the tree, making a slight rattle noise before coming out of sight. Icepaw followed him, safely in the shelter of the leaves now. But Flamepaw was nowhere in sight. "Flamepaw?" asked Icepaw in a low voice.

He looked around for a second, until the DarkClan apprentice popped out of a small hole in the tree. "Come on, in here," he whispered, "before a patrol comes!"

Icepaw nodded and followed Flamepaw closely, his nose touching the apprentice's tail so he wouldn't loose him again. He crouched down into the small hole in the large tree, and walked through, making Icepaw wonder what was inside. Just as he entered, he realized it was only a tree hollow.

Flamepaw sighed and sat down. "If we keep our voices down, we won't be caught," he said.

"Fine," Icepaw muttered. There was a silence for a second, until Icepaw growled again. "What is DarkClan living off of?"

Flamepaw flinched. "What?"

"I fought a four moon old apprentice yesterday," he said, "and you admitted yourself that DarkClan doesn't follow part of the warrior code. And they *kill.* I need answers." A list of these thoughts traveled through his head again.

He could barely see Flamepaw's face against the dark tree. "There is nothing to be said if you want to meddle into my Clan's business," he growled in response.

Icepaw wanted to force answers out of Flamepaw, but he knew he had to just push him. "But real warriors don't kill, and we let the warrior code rule our heats," answered Icepaw. "I need to know—to set things right. Featherbreeze is dead." His head looked down to his paws. "I won't let more of my Clanmates die."

Flamepaw sighed. "DarkClan won't listen to you, so nothing is to be set right either," responded the apprentice.

That vision I had that day when Flamepaw saved me from drowning . . . did it have to do with DarkClan? Icepaw looked up. "But maybe if you try, as Sandstar's apprentice, you can change their ways." His eyes looked pleading, and he leaned forward a bit. "Flamepaw . . . *the darkness was never meant to be.*"

"And two cats high and proud will lead and destroy," sided Flamepaw. "Do you think I don't know about the prophecy?"

Icepaw gasped. "The what?"

"*The darkness was never meant to be and two cats high and proud will lead and destroy,"* answered Flamepaw. "The prophecy about leadership and destruction."

Icepaw's eyes widened. *That means the darkness is rising, isn't it?* he thought. *I have to protect MoonClan! I have to tell somebody . . . but who?*

Flamepaw's tail twitched. "Something terrible is going to happen," he continued. "That's all I really do know about it, but that is all the information I am willing to give. Facts about DarkClan are off-limits." The apprentice's amber eyes blazed.

"But what if I tell you the warrior code?" asked Icepaw. "Maybe . . . you will accept it, and will share it with your Clan? Things could be set right, you know."

Flamepaw sighed. "It's just that . . . there are things that shouldn't be known. Goodbye Icepaw." And with that, Flamepaw climbed out of the tree hollow, and into the open back into DarkClan. "Run upwind from this tree and you'll meet your borders soon." Flamepaw leaped down from his tree, leaving Icepaw completely alone.

I . . . I can't believe this! I thought Flamepaw was my friend! thought Icepaw. *Why is StarClan taking everything away from me now? Life use to be simple and happy, but now I know things are changing. And there is no way to stop it.*

* * *

Icepaw's paws ached by the time he reached MoonClan's borders again. But he knew he couldn't stop walking just yet. He had to get somewhere safe before he returned back to camp, and he knew he'd be in serious trouble.

His stomach rumbled deeply. Icepaw felt that it hurt! He hadn't eaten much yesterday, and nothing today as well. The faster he would get to MoonClan, the better. But suddenly, a twig cracked behind him. He turned quickly, and saw a DarkClan she-cat behind him.

"What were you doing on my territory?" she demanded with a growl.

Icepaw didn't stop walking. "And what are you doing on MoonClan's territory, huh?"

"Well, getting to you of course," she said, padding a bit closer. "Oh, wait, aren't you that cat's son that I killed? Wasn't her name . . . Featherbreeze?"

Icepaw stopped in his tracks. This was the she-cat that killed Featherbreeze! He turned to her. "How dare you!" he growled, leaping at her without a warning and pinning her down.

No, Icepaw! Don't do it! You had enough battles for a day, didn't you? the same she-cat voiced in his mind. *Please, don't get yourself hurt!*

Icepaw ignored the voice and kept the she-cat pinned down to the ground. "You killed Featherbreeze! I will make you pay!" he growled, unsheathing his claws onto her neck. He buried them deep into her flesh. "You took away someone dear to me!"

"Featherbreeze killed a Clanmate of mine, too!" she spat back. "I simply got my revenge!"

"But you would've killed her anyways!" hissed Icepaw. "I hate you!" His claws went deeper, and just by the sound of it, more cats were coming.

The she-cat kicked Icepaw over and bit down hard onto his tail, making him cry with utter pain. He yanked it free, turned to her, and leaped again, raking his claws down her back brutally. Her claws raked him as well, and it stung so much!

Icepaw staggered back, growling with so much might. Just then, a MoonClan patrol ran out from the undergrowth and into the clearing. Before him stood Shadowheart, Sparrowheart, Dewpaw and Dawnpaw. They must be a search patrol, by the looks of it. He shot them a glance before turning right back to the she-cat.

"Oh, your little friends came to help you finish me off, I see! Well, go ahead! I'm not stopping any cat from killing me!" she said with a

rough voice.

"This is our battle, you and me!" returned Icepaw. "Give me your best."

The she-cat's eyes widened with craze. "With pleasure!" she hissed, charging forward and bashing her head into Icepaw's chest. He coughed, some blood running down his mouth. He ignored it and growled harder, going at her himself. The she-cat was about to claw him, but he leaped, twisting in midair and landed on her back, clawing down hard so that she wouldn't throw him off.

She yowled with anger, and Sparrowheart darted forward. "Icepaw!" he cried, "I'm coming!"

Shadowheart stepped in front of Sparrowheart. "Stop, you can't change what's about to happen, Sparrowheart. This is Fallentail and Icepaw's fight."

So her name is Fallentail, thought Icepaw.

Fallentail leaped into the air, half of a back flip, and landed right on her back on top of Icepaw. The wind was knocked out of him, and a warm fuzzy feeling came into his chest and lungs as he struggled for air. But as soon as she got off of him, Icepaw forced himself to recover. He must win this battle!

Dewpaw, in the background, was fidgeting like crazy. His tail lashed, his head swung from side to side, and he was shaking. His eyes looked like they craved something. *He craves to fight, too. He craves to know her battle moves,* thought Icepaw.

He took a deep breath and looked at her in the eye. "I'm going to kill you," he said to her in a low voice.

"Come on," she spat. "Don't say things that are not true."

Icepaw snarled. "I don't lie."

Once more, he went after her. He raked down her face, like he did yesterday with another DarkClan warrior, and she hissed with pain, just as her claws hooked his ear. Icepaw gasped as he felt it being

torn. He yowled with pain and collapsed on the ground, gasping. It was the same ear that Beetlepaw bit on in their last battle.

I've had it! thought Icepaw with rage. He went after her once more, and knocked her to the ground with all the strength he could muster. She struggled under his grip as he pinned her down hard again. He can't take his time now. Icepaw dived down, biting hard onto Fallentail's neck like he would do to a piece of prey.

She kept struggling, but Icepaw did not let go only until he felt her limp in his jaws. Weak, with now many wounds, Icepaw let go. Blood began to pour around her. Icepaw's legs trembled. He felt weak—weak and satisfied.

Finally at peace, Icepaw collapsed onto the ground, everything around him turning black.

Chapter Eleven

Edited ✔

I cannot believe I am this far already >o< Thanks for 70 stars! I also have almost 1k reads. . . . if you enjoy this book so far, THANK YOU SOO MUCH! I wouldn't be posting without you guys :) feel free to comment, vote, share, or any type of support. Thank you :D

Icepaw groaned as he got up, his body ached and stung. He could smell medicine around him. He realized in just a moment that he was in Vinetail's den. He looked up, not daring to move the rest of his body but only his head. He felt a paw push him back down.

"Don't move," Vinetail ordered. "Your wounds are bad, and I am trying my best to help you."

Icepaw didn't reply. He felt too sore to talk. Just then, Sweetpaw walked through the entrance of the den with bundles of wet moss in her mouth.

"Here Vinetail, I got what you asked for."

Vinetail nodded. "Thank you, Sweetpaw," he said. "Give me some, also give Icepaw something to drink, too."

Sweetpaw nodded and padded over to Icepaw, holding nothing but a piece of dripping wet moss. Icepaw's throat ached for the cold water, even though it was cold outside already. "Here Icepaw," she offered. "Open up."

Without hesitation, Icepaw opened his mouth, and she poured some water in. Icepaw thankfully drank it up. At least something now felt better. On the other side of Icepaw, a cat groaned. It was Ashtail! He must be here too, then. Icepaw remembered how seriously injured his mentor was.

Vinetail sighed. "It's hard keeping up with five sick cats at once," he murmured. "Sweetpaw, give Ashtail some poppy, and give Spottedkit and Ripplefur some more catmint." He looked down to Icepaw. "I'll be right back—I have to check on Rainwhisker."

Sweetpaw went to the back of the medicine den and grabbed three poppy seeds. She padded back over to Ashtail and fed him some. "I'll be back as well," she said after getting some catmint.

As soon as she left, Ashtail spoke up. "I've heard about your fight with Fallentail," he said weakly. "Listen, Brightstar is mad, but I am proud of you."

Icepaw couldn't see Ashtail. He was turned the other way. "Brightstar is mad at me?"

Ashtail nodded. "Yeah, she's angry at you," he said. "She thought you were dead for a moment and was super worried—oh, and you should've seen Sparrowheart. But when Vinetail reported that you were alive and doing at the very least better than me, she said she was gonna kill you."

"Oh," Icepaw said. "I guess I can understand."

After all, he ran out of camp against the rules, he tresspassed into DarkClan, and he killed a cat, all of which broke various rules on the warrior code. Something he so rightfully used to follow—something he wanted to convince Flamepaw to follow. But he felt that his actions were the right thing to do. It truly felt like it. . .

Icepaw sighed. He wished that Featherbreeze wasn't dead, then none of these things would of happened. Slowly, he got up, his legs shaking. He felt that his wounds were already treated and dressed, and his ear felt warmly rapped with cobwebs.

His stomach growled.

Ashtail looked up and smiled. "Here, you must be hungry," he said. "I have leftovers from a vole I never finished."

Icepaw ducked his head in embarrasment. "But you need it more than me."

Ashtail shook his head. "My belly is full. You can have the rest, Icepaw."

He nodded. "Thank you." Padding over, he took a small bite. It was warm. Icepaw began to eat the rest of his vole, thanking StarClan with each bite he took.

It tastes so good, he thought.

Just when he finished, Vinetail walked through the den. "Icepaw," he said. "Come with me." He also looked down to Ashtail for a quick second. They nodded to each other.

Icepaw wanted to ask why, but he figured he shouldn't question things especially after the things he did. He followed Vinetail across the clearing, to Brightstar's den. He mentally groaned, wanting to leave. He knew what was going to happen already—Brightstar must be very angry with him then.

He padded into the Moonrock den, sighing as he sat down by the entrance. Vinetail sat near him, Brightstar on her nest with Sparrowheart close by her. He gulped and looked up to his leader.

Brightstar nodded. "I called you here once more to talk," she said. "And I don't expect you to run off like that again." Her eyes narrowed.

Icepaw ducked his head in embarrassment. "S-sorry."

"And," Brightstar continued, "what you did was *reckless.* All of MoonClan knows very well that you've crossed DarkClan borders—and not to mention that fight!" Icepaw ducked his head down, not knowing what to say. "And there's more."

"Yes, Brightstar," he murmured.

"You've began something," she meowed, her eyes locking into Icepaw's.

"Began something?" asked Icepaw. "What do you possibly mean by that?"

Brightstar continued to speak. "By killing Fallentail, you've started war," she said. Icepaw opened his mouth to protest, but Brightstar cut him off. "It's not a good thing, but it's also not a bad thing. Shadowheart and Dewpaw left Fallentail's body on the border of DarkClan and MoonClan. I think they found it already and they probably know that we aren't taking Featherbreeze's death lightly."

I can't believe it, thought Icepaw. *I don't know if I did the right thing anymore.*

"And," Sparrowheart continued, "we can't take your actions lightly either, as much as I hate to say it."

Vinetail nodded. "We discussed your punishment. Every day when you get back from a patrol, you're going to clean out the elder's bedding, or change them if needed. Regular apprentice duties. And the others aren't going to help you."

"How long am I going to have to do it?" Icepaw asked.

"I don't know," said Brightstar. "Perhaps until the next Gathering."

Icepaw mentally groaned. That would be in a while from now! But he probably deserved it, since he broke the warrior code. Sighing, he nodded respectfully, turning to leave. No cat stopped him.

Even though Icepaw was unconcious for a while, he felt sleepy. Slowly, the MoonClan tom padded over to the apprentice den, and lied down in his comfortable nest. For some reason, he still felt Vinetail's gaze on his back, and the silent gossip of his Clanmates going all around about his battle wounds. Ignoring them, Icepaw fell asleep.

His eyes opened again, but he was somewhere else. *Another dream,* Icepaw immediately realized. He looked around at his surroundings, recognizing the place as soon as his eyes got used to the darkness of the Twilight Forest. He wasn't scared this time—he felt powerful because he could fight now.

Two moons ago I was a whimpy kit, but now I'm a strong apprentice. Any cat that comes, I will defend myself. Icepaw raised his chin in

pride as he continued forward, his claws unsheathed.

A slight breeze blew, carrying a few faint cat scents. Icepaw decided that it would not go uninvestigated. He began to follow the breeze, his eyes squinting at the winds, but he was eager to see what he'd run in to. Icepaw's dreams were too full of surprises, and this could help him forget about the incident with Fallentail and Featherbreeze.

Just then, a scent began to rise up in his nose, and before he could see the cat, he could hear his paw steps on the ground. The Twilight Warrior who first attacked Icepaw when he was a kit emerged behind a tree stump, his tail flicking with surprise.

"Oh, it's you again," he said. "I thought I sensed anger over this side of the territory. What happened? Full of revenge, waiting to take?"

Icepaw growled. "I've already got my revenge," he said. "Fallentail killed my mother, and I killed Fallentail in return. Apparently I've started some kind of war with DarkClan and MoonClan." He looked down to his paws.

The Twilight warrior brought his tail to Icepaw's head. "You knew it was going to happen anyways," he said. "War." He walked all around the apprentice. "And killing Fallentail was not a mistake. She was a weak excuse for a warrior anyways."

"Yeah," Icepaw agreed with a slight growl. "It was never a mistake. It was her fault! She should of never killed Featherbreeze."

The Twilight warrior smirked. "My name is Shard," he said.

"Icepaw," replied the apprentice.

"I know," said Shard. "Hey, don't you want to see Featherbreeze?"

Icepaw nodded. "With all my heart, I do," he said, thinking about her right now, and how much she has helped him in her days. He also thought about the last act she did---an act of bravery and love to save Icepaw from the attack of DarkClan. "I . . . have so much to say to her."

Shard nodded. "She's over StarClan borders," he meowed. "Let me take you there, if you'd like."

"N-no," murmured Icepaw. "This is not the time to be mourning over her anymore. I have to get over her death and accept the fact that she is gone." He looked up to Shard. "I want to be strong."

"Hmm," murmured Shard. "Strong, eh?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what strong means to you." Shard's eyes flickered in interest as he stared down to Icepaw. "Better yet—show me, too."

Icepaw thought for a moment. "Strength. . . . is being the cat that can pin everyone else down," he said unsheathing his claws. "The cat who knows how to fight every battle move, who knows every battle tactic."

His tail lashed, feeling proud.

Shard stared at him for a moment. "Look," he said. "I know I am a cat who has no place in StarClan. But the Twilight Warriors aren't like that. Strength is knowing mentally what to do, what the right thing is, and yes, battle." Icepaw stared at Shard, speachless. "Show me what strength is to you."

Icepaw growled and leaped at Shard, his claws unsheathed. Shard easily dogded.

"You can't show strength like that! You gotta be close enough to me to make sure I do not leap. Then, when you pin me down, show me what strength is, Icepaw!" Shard growled.

"Alright!" said Icepaw with frustration. He stared at Shard. *What is this cat trying to do? First he tries to kill me, then he offers me to see Featherbreeze and now he is trying to teach me how to fight? What does he want with me?*

Shard leaped right on Icepaw and pinned him down easily with his large size. "That is how you do it."

"I wasn't ready!" growled Icepaw.

"In battle cats will not let you up to try again just because you weren't ready," he responded simply, letting Icepaw get up. "You're weak Icepaw. Physically, mentally weak. I saw how crazy you were when Featherbreeze died. *Weak.*"

Icepaw stared at Shard, yet again, speachless. Sure, he could understand that he wasn't a strong warrior yet, but mentally? There was nothing mentally wrong with him!

He felt his side being nudged, though there was nobody there. Finally, after a last look at Shard, he woke up, eyes opening wide. He gasped, scared for a second, then saw Silverkit standing over him with worry.

"Wake up," she said. "Please wake up."

Icepaw groaned in pain. "Silverkit, you're touching my wounds," he murmured, getting up slightly. Her eyes looked sad. "What happened?"

Silverkit buried her face in Icepaw's fur. "Oh, Icepaw, it won't stop! Death won't stop!" she cried, clinging on hard to Icepaw with her needle-like claws.

"What are you talking about?" Icepaw asked, suddenly scared.

"I-it's Ripplefur," she mewed, "a-and Spottedkit. StarClan took them. Ripplefur is gone!"

Icepaw bursted out of his nest and ran into the MoonClan clearing. His eyes were wide to the sight of her grieving mate, Skypelt. His heart broke automatically. Why were StarClan taking so many cats? Is there a war going on there too, and they need strong warriors like Ripplefur and Featherbreeze?

Dawnpaw, Volepaw and Sweetpaw, Ripplefur's little siblings, grieved right by Skypelt. He broke down to the ground, nuzzling Silverkit close to him.

StarClan, please, relieve this grief from MoonClan, he thought. *Stop it*

all! Please!

Author's Note #1

Hey all of you Warriors fans. Thank you for all the support i've been getting. I know I haven't gotten 100 stars yet but 82 is quite a lot. Thank you so much!! So first things first. I can't be posting this weekend until probably Tuesday.

Also, yeah, yeah I make all these pages long but if you want them shorter ask me :D I don't mind making them shorter. I just thought longer was better for a while cause normally people's books range only up to four pages. I wanted to try something new ^_^

Also, please comment, rate, share, etc , and all these different types of support. Yeah I know I always say this but I am so happy lots of people want to read my book :3 I wanna see how good (or bad) I can write so I can improve. Lemme know your feedback! <3

Chapter Twelve

Edited ✔

After months I've gone this far, and, CHAPTER TWELVE, FINALLY! WOOT, WOOT! I am excited to where this book will lead! Anyways, I am back, also as the WattyWarrior's new admin :) Please check out there account, it's on my profile and they are also dedicated in one of my chapters in the book. WattyWarriors is a fan magazine thing for the Warriors Fan dom (duh) and advertises other author s to hundreds of readers. Check them out and possibly you'll be interviewed if you get recommended!

Icepaw let out a long sigh as he placed down the last piece of moss on the elder's bedding. He was exhausted. Today, though, was the day Brightstar promised he'd finally be out of punishment for what he did last moon when Featherbreeze died. Her death still clung hard to his head, but he was forced to live through it.

Thrushclaw padded into the den, holding a plump vole in his jaws. "Hi again, Icepaw," the elder greeted, climbing into his nest. "Ah, I'll miss having a new fresh moss nest every single day."

Icepaw nodded. "I think that Stripeeye's nest will be the last of my punishment," he meowed, "since the Gathering is tonight."

Thrushclaw bit into the vole, eating only small bites. "I hope Stripeeyes gets back soon. This is our prey for the day, and he's out getting water. He won't be happy to see his meal cold."

"Then you should wait for him," advised Icepaw with a small smile. "That old cat gets grumpy too much."

He scented something, and the gray tabby tom walked into the den as well, his almost blind eyes glaring hard at Icepaw. "Hey, I ain't that old," he growled. "But I'll get grumpier if you don't finish changing my moss!"

Icepaw gasped and looked at Stripeeyes. "Oh, sorry," he said, a bit embarrassed. He set down the new moss, straightening it out and made sure that there was no thorns, bugs or dirt on it. Perfect, there was nothing in sight. "There you go!"

Stripeeyes nodded to Icepaw, settling down in his nest with comfort. "Hey, let me have a few bites," he told Thrushclaw, who began to munch down in the vole.

"Okay," replied the other elder, pushing over the piece of prey. Icepaw's stomach rumbled even more now. When were warriors and apprentices allowed to eat? He couldn't wait till the hunting patrols returned. Leaf-bare had just begun, and he and the rest of the Clan were running out of prey to eat.

He looked down to the two elders. "Is there anything else you would like me to do?" he asked. "Err, before I leave?"

"Go on," said Stripeeyes. "Thrushclaw and I need our peace."

Icepaw dipped his head, turned and left. The camp was half deserted. Squirrelkit and Silverkit slept peacefully in the nursery, with the new queen, Nightrose by them. She announced that she was going to have Fireshade's kits just a few days ago. The only apprentice in camp was Volepaw as well as the medicine-cat apprentice, Sweetpaw.

She rushed out of the medicine den, walking over to Icepaw.

"Hi," Icepaw meowed.

Sweetpaw sighed. "Go bury the old moss," she ordered, "with leaf-bare here we have to get rid of things that the elders, who get sick way too much, use."

Icepaw's tail dropped. Sweetpaw didn't even return his greeting. "Alright," he muttered with annoyance, grabbing the bundles in his jaws before slowly padding out of camp. She went right back to the medicine den.

I swear to StarClan that Sweetpaw is too obsessed with herbs, thought Icepaw angrily. He trailed out of camp, the moss becoming

uncomfortable in his mouth. He wished that he was the only one who has to do this. He'd been collecting moss this whole moon!

He could hear a patrol in the distance as he found the perfect spot to dig. It was the StreamClan border patrol coming near. He ignored them for a second and began to dig his hole, throwing the moss inside. The patrol was very close now.

He could see Fireshade leading Dawnpaw, Shadowheart and Grayfur over. He could also smell fresh kill. Had they found prey while on a border patrol? As he finished burying the moss, they crossed his path.

"Hi Icepaw!" Dawnpaw meowed cheerfully.

"Hey," he said, patting the ground. "There, finished."

"Finished with what?" asked Dawnpaw curiously. "Oh, come, Fireshade's patrol isn't gonna wait for us." She began to pad ahead, in back of Grayfur as the rear.

Icepaw trotted over. "I was just burying the elder's old moss," he explained. "Sweetpaw ordered me to do so because she said the elders can get sick easily, and she doesn't want anymore sickness in camp."

"You're letting her boss you around?" snorted Dawnpaw with a laugh. "That sounds very silly!"

Grayfur laughed right in front of the two. "Well, Dawnpaw, she's becoming just like Vinetail," the senior warrior pointed out. "And she's obsessed with herbs."

"Tell me about it," muttered Icepaw, rolling his eyes. "Have you seen Dewpaw anywhere?"

Dawnpaw shook her head. "No, he's hunting near StreamClan, remember?" she asked. "His patrol is going to come when ours gets back to camp."

Icepaw sighed and nodded. "Okay, that's fine," he said. Icepaw followed the patrol until they got to camp, his paws cold on the

forest floor. The silence was still taking place in the Clan, and a chill of unease ran up his spine. The silence was . . . unusual.

He shrugged and padded over to the warrior's den. Sparrowheart was silently sitting in the back of the den, his eyes on his paws. Icepaw padded over to his father slowly.

"Hi." The apprentice made sure he was speaking slowly. "Sparrowheart?"

For a moment, the tom didn't move, until he finally looked up and down to his son. "Oh, uh, sorry . . . Icepaw," said Sparrowheart, struggling with words. He'd been like this since Featherbreeze's, Ripplefur's and Spottedkit's untimely deaths. "I was just lost in thought."

"Oh, okay," Icepaw replied. "I was just wondering if there was anything else you wanted me to do."

Sparrowheart shook his head. "No. Brightstar is going to announce the cats who are going to the gathering when the last two patrols arrive. You can start to eat, but something small."

"Okay, th-thanks," said the gray tom, awkwardly padding out of the den. He hoped he didn't disturb the other warriors. As soon as he padded out, his eyes rested on the fresh kill pile, disturbing his belly even more.

Well, Sparrowheart did say that I was allowed to have my share now, thought the gray apprentice. He padded over and looked at his choices. Either a thrush, two mice or squirrel. He decided to take the smallest mouse for himself since he had nobody to share anything with. Besides, the fresh kill pile should be stocked as soon as the patrols get back to camp.

Sighing, Icepaw settled down with his prey, and his tail lashed with hunger. The camp was still quiet, small talks going all around. He ate his prey alone, not willing to bother any cat.

Finally, as soon as Icepaw was done with his meal, he could see the StreamClan hunting patrol get back, followed by the last border

patrol. He watched as Dewpaw came into camp first, holding a large vole and mouse in his jaws proudly. He must've been lucky today.

Dawnpaw went running up, gasping. "Wow!" she said, completely amazed. "How'd you get such good catches?"

Mousetail smiled in pride. "He's a good hunter," the senior warrior boasted about his apprentice. "He trains hard and does very well in most of his hunts."

"Thanks," said Dewpaw.

Icepaw shrunk to himself, remaining silent. The small mouse's delicious taste faded away in his mouth as Dewpaw dropped his prey onto the fresh kill pile. It also seemed that the hunting party caught another squirrel and thrush. It was enough to feed most the Clan, but Icepaw already has had his share.

He slowly padded over to the apprentice den, letting his brother receive all the attention. It was better if all these cats forgot about him anyways. He didn't feel like talking most days.

Just as he sat down comfortably in his own nest, Brightstar walked into the den after him. "Icepaw," she said. He looked up quickly, surprised. What would Brightstar want out of him? "Tonight is the Gathering as you know, and you are officially relieved from your punishment."

Icepaw dipped his head to her. "Thank you Brightstar."

"You'd best not get too comfortable here, I am about to make an announcement," she meowed, walking out of the den, her tail flicking as if beckoning him forward. Icepaw shrugged and followed, sitting in the back of the large group of Clan cats.

The MoonClan leader climbed to the top of the Moonrock, and looked down to her Clan. "Everyone gather here for an announcement!" she called, not having to summon her Clan into the clearing. Most cats were there anyways. "I have decided which cats to take to the Gathering with me." She paused, and every cat

including Icepaw looked up hopefully. "I choose Sparrowheart, Vinetail, Fireshade, Nightrose, Skypelt, Bluewing, Sagepelt, Rosepetal, Rainwhisker, Sharpfang, Volepaw and Dewpaw."

Icepaw's tail drooped even though he knew it was coming.

"That is all the cats I am willing to take tonight. Eat, rest, and prepare yourself for the Gathering," the leader ordered, and climbed down from her spot and padded into her den.

Dewpaw walked over eagerly. "I can't believe I get to go to the gathering!" he said eagerly.

Icepaw nodded and smiled. "Brightstar was right to choose you," he said. "But hey, if you don't tell me the details of what happens tonight I will claw your throat out, got it?"

Dewpaw's whiskers twitched. "Alright. I gotta get ready, I'll talk to you later," he said, waving his tail before walking in the opposite direction.

Icepaw nodded, laying down in his own nest comfortably. The sun was down already, so why bother stay awake if he wasn't going to go to the Gathering? As he slowly closed his eyes, the last thing he could see was Brightstar's watchful eyes staring right back at his.

He was awake again, but he knew that it was just a dream. He sat from a large rock, similar to the one from the Gathering. He realized in just a moment he *was* at the Clan's gathering place! His fur bristled and he tensed, growling to himself a little.

What am I doing here? Icepaw snarled in his head. *Haven't I experienced enough strange dreams? Haven't I gone through enough trouble? What does StarClan want from me!*

His claws unsheathed, not knowing what to expect. Nothing but a slight breeze stirred in the cool moonlight. Leaves drifted through the wind, carrying a fresh scent of every Clan, DarkClan's scent stood out the most. But suddenly, he felt the area darknen.

Icepaw gasped, looking up to the moon to see the clouds covering his only bright source of light. The moon was full and bright, but

slowly faded away as StarClan covered the beautiful full circle.

StarClan! thought Icepaw with a start, gasping and tensing. *Is . . . this a sign? Are you trying to tell me something?* The gray apprentice's amber eyes blazed as all the light disappeared. It felt dark, darker than he has ever seen. *Is this a sign, or is StarClan mad at the Clans again?*

Icepaw woke up with a start.

"Icepaw!" his brother growled, shoving him. "Get up, won't you?"

The gray apprentice groaned, slowly lifting his head off of his comfortable nest. "What is it now, Dewpaw?" he mumbled. "Weren't you going"—he was cut off by a small yawn—"to the Gathering?"

Dewpaw laughed a little. "You're a heavy sleeper," he meowed, sitting down and washing his paws. "The Gathering passed, you were just asleep."

Icepaw yawned again and nodded, getting up to his paws. "So what happened there, Dewpaw?" he asked, wondering what was going on with DarkClan.

Dewpaw growled to himself. "The moon disappeared again tonight," he explained to his brother. "DarkClan was picking fights with MarshClan and MoonClan as soon as Brightstar pointed out the attacks from last moon. MarshClan was completely on our side. The other Clans were silent."

"Oh," murmured Icepaw. "Anything about the other Clans, besides the silence?" *Maybe this is what my dream meant,* he thought.

"StreamClan kept yapping about their prey supply," he muttered, "kept sayin' things about how good they were managing, and how many kits they were getting. Pretty annoying if you ask me. Also it's the same old thing with CloudClan. MarshClan seemed completely honest, because they said that they weren't doing too good and Sandstar looked pretty happy about that. Brightstar only *carefully* told them about Ripplefur and Featherbreeze."

"Nothing about Spottedkit or Ashtail?" asked Icepaw with a

surprise.

Dewpaw shook his head. "Of course not," he said. "Spottedkit and Ashtail are our closely guarded secrets. Until Ashtail is fully healed, nobody will know that he's hurt. Spottedkit is among StarClan, yes, but every cat of the other Clans only believe Ripplefur had two kits. Spottedkit will only make DarkClan want to attack us more 'cause they will think we're weak."

Icepaw sat back, thinking for a moment. *The Clan cats must think that Ripplefur died in battle as well. Brightstar didn't speak of Spottedkit because then everyone else will think that there was sickness in MoonClan.*

He admired Brightstar's tact. To be a leader must mean to protect your Clan in every way possible.

He nodded to Dewpaw. "I understand now, I guess."

"Good," laughed the apprentice. "Explaining things is hard."

Icepaw shrugged. "I don't know."

Dewpaw nodded. "Well, come on Icepaw! I actually came here to get you. You're on the MarshClan hunting patrol with me, Mousetail and Skypelt."

Chapter Thirteen

Edited ✔

a/n yes, it is true you may recognize something from Bluestar's Prophecy here. When I wrote this chapter over a year ago, I had just finished reading Bluestar's prophecy and I realized how similar Icepaw and Bluestar's feelings were because they went though something similar. So thus, I took inspiration from the real warriors series, but I only did it this once. Don't be mad because I never did it again XD (sorry:,)) I swear it was just this one time. Anyways, on with the chapter.

Icepaw chased after the squirrel he was after. It scurried up the tree, and he leaped after it, clawing the bark hard with his claws as he scrambled up the tree. It's fluffy gray tail was last seen as it entered a hole, too small for him to fit. He growled to himself, thinking, *Mouse dung!*

Icepaw released his grip on the bark and slid backward down the trunk of the naked dead oak tree. The squirrel had been too quick for him and already had disappeared in it's safe cozy nest, where no predator would be able to catch it. He was angry at himself for missing such an important piece of food.

He sighed as he got to the bottom, his paws instantly sinking into the thick snow on the forest floor. A moon ago or so, snow had already begun to fall and MoonClan wasn't at their best with prey. That squirrel was just another loss for his Clanmate's hunger—he cursed at himself for that.

Fireshade laughed a bit and ducked as snow fell from the branches of the trees. "Don't worry, Icepaw!" he called down to the apprentice. He was climbing up another tree. "Squirrels are harder to catch in thick snow."

Well obviously! Icepaw thought angrily as he sniffed the air for more prey. *Why does Fireshade and the other mentors treat me like Ashtail*

gave me no training?

He wished that he had Ashtail back, but his old mentor was still in the medicine den. He never treated Icepaw like he was stupid. He knew very well that Icepaw could hunt and knew about the prey and the weathers. Mousetail and Sparrowheart always said that it was good since he'd learn from three different cats with three different experiences, but that wasn't true. They'd never pay as much attention to him, and more to their other apprentices. They treated him like he didn't matter.

Icepaw kept sniffing the air, and caught a whiff of mouse. It wasn't much, but it was something. He crouched down, making sure he was low to the ground. His belly touched the cold frosty floor of the snow, and he stalked forward, tracking the delicious scent of prey. If only he had caught that squirrel, MoonClan would do the tiniest bit better.

He heard the squeaks of the mice under a tiny burrow in the tree. The bark looked easy enough to rip through and snatch them up. Perhaps there were more than just two merely scrawny mice in there? Icepaw hoped as walked towards it, their scent and sounds became louder.

Maybe his paw would fit inside the hole? He didn't know what to do to get them out of there, but as soon as he got to the burrow, he forced the bark to rip from the oak tree, and spotted three mice about to leap out of the entrance past Icepaw. They were headed for the snow.

Not if a hungry MoonClan apprentice can help it! he growled in his mind, snatching one up with his claws. It was instantly dead, pierced in the belly by Icepaw. He went for the other and bit down hard on it's neck, also careful so he couldn't let the blood run through and out. Icepaw snatched the last one as well and looked down at the three mice in pride. They were small, but at least something.

Mousetail arrived, holding a small gray squirrel in his mouth. "Impressive catch, Icepaw," he complimented, setting down his own prey. "This hunt is doing well."

Icepaw shrugged, not replying. He stalked towards a bush and buried them in a small hole he can easily remember. He didn't want to forget where he put his prey in this time of weather. Dawnpaw had also caught something. By the look of it, she carried a plump starling in her mouth, proud with her catch.

The Clan would be fed today.

He left the spot where he buried his prey, and sighed deeply. It was cold. Colder than he had ever felt. Icepaw wished that it was green-leaf again, curled up close by Dewkit and Featherbreeze. Grief pierced his heart as he remembered the unfair battle between MoonClan and DarkClan, including Icepaw's reckless acts. There was not a day he'd go without thinking about it.

Dewpaw padded up from behind. "Look," he said with pride, holding up a gray squirrel the size of Mousetail's. "Now we have two of them!"

Dawnpaw's eyes glittered. "Nice catch!" she said, admiring the fresh kill. "Is this enough for the Clan?"

Fireshade leaped down from the tree, grunting in anger that he had missed a thrush up in the snowy branches. "I don't know yet. Give it more time. I need to find a way to lure out the prey. Having caught nothing is aggravating."

Mousetail shrugged. "Go ahead, we need more prey for the Clan anyways," he said. "Dewpaw, Icepaw, Dawnpaw, come with me. Maybe we can hunt somewhere else. We've already covered this part of the territory."

"Sure," Dawnpaw said cheerfully, walking besides Dewpaw and her mentor.

Icepaw sighed. "Can I just go back to camp?" he muttered, but to himself so he wouldn't start conflict. He hoped that nobody heard him. He wished he had Ashtail back more than ever now. When would Brightstar appoint his new mentor? It has been two moons now. . . .

Mousetail led them to a clearing not far off from their hunting spot. It was bright, white snow covered almost everything. How would they hunt here, out in the open? Every cat knows clearly that prey is hunted in the trees, since they live and dwell in the forest—*not* in the open.

The patrol scattered, Dawnpaw and Dewpaw staying together. Mousetail went in a completely different direction, and Icepaw was on his own again.

He looked up into the white frosted sky, which outlined the tall trees. Perhaps there was something near the bigger trees? He padded in that direction, sniffing the cold air to see what was out there. He passed the clearing, back into the forest in the cover of the trees. Did he scent . . . vole . . . or was that a mouse?

It was stale. Icepaw kept creeping up in the forest floor, tracking down any scent. He was still guilty about losing the squirrel. That piece of prey could of been better than anything else he would've caught. Finally, he found the vole scent. It was stale with a mixture of something else. Curious, Icepaw followed the scent.

He ended up in front of a small burrow, but big enough to fit a full grown cat. It wasn't, though, big enough for a badger. *Hmm,* he thought as he padded close to it. There was a fresh scent of something he did not recognize. Was that a fox scent?

"Icepaw!" a voice harshly whispered. It was Mousetail. "Get away from there!"

Icepaw looked over to see Dewpaw's mentor standing over, a small distance away from the burrow. But he was too late. A full grown fox stumbled out of the den, yawning, half asleep. A second later, it spotted Icepaw and growled, tucking it's tail between it's legs, and flattening it's ears, barring it's teeth.

Mousetail shrunk back in fear. "Run!" he called to Icepaw, who was frozen in his spot. Mousetail growled too and ran up, shoving the apprentice so he could move.

Icepaw gasped as soon as he did, and began to do what Mousetail

said. The two pounded through the forest, with a fox at their heels. Icepaw turned to see the red creature. "It's gaining on us!" he warned.

Mousetail hissed. "We have to get away from the camp, Icepaw!"

Icepaw nodded, and followed Mousetail as he changed directions. Icepaw knew it wasn't gonna stop following them. He could scent Dawnpaw and Dewpaw. They passed them, but were far enough to let the fox know that the only two creatures in the forest were the two cats it was chasing.

"What do we do?" said Icepaw with a shrill of horror.

Mousetail stopped running and swung back, turning to the fox. Icepaw stopped too, knowing what that meant. They had to chase it off and fight it. "I will attack it and you will catch it from the back," said Mousetail.

Icepaw nodded, and the senior warrior charged to the full grown fox, claws unsheathed. He leaped at it, but immediately it snapped at Mousetail, making him fall and roll over. The fox towered over him. Icepaw snarled and bit hard onto the fox's tail, making it whimper loudly. Just as it did, Fireshade and the other two apprentices came crashing to the clearing where Mousetail and Icepaw fought.

Fireshade hissed to himself, sprinting to the fox and pinned it down from the back. Icepaw had just realized that he did not follow Mousetail's orders. *Oops,* he thought. Mousetail leaped to his paws, and scratched the fox in the face, making it stumble back with shock. Dewpaw and Dawnpaw joined Icepaw, flanking him.

"We have to help them!" exclaimed Dawnpaw, trembling with fear.

Dewpaw nodded with agreement. "Come on!" he said, running up to the fox with unsheathed claws. Icepaw followed his brother. The fox flipped over and squished Fireshade underneath him, nipping Mousetail's leg.

But before it could even get up, Icepaw and Dewpaw pinned it

down, but not hard enough so Fireshade can squirm from underneath. He was panting hard, probably since the wind was knocked out of him. Icepaw knew foxes were tough, but not this tough!

"Icepaw, Dewpaw, keep him down!" shouted Mousetail, scrambling up as well. "Fireshade, Dawnpaw, help me out!"

"Got it!" Icepaw said, pinning the fox down harder. It struggled roughly underneath him, growling and whimpering as well as his claws dug into its thick fur. Mousetail nipped at it's snout just as the fox managed to push off the two apprentices. It was whimpering, covered in scratches and blood.

Mousetail and Fireshade charged at it, but it turned, running off into the direction of CloudClan.

"We got 'em!" Dawnpaw cheered, her eyes blazing with triumph. "I can't wait to get back to camp and tell the others."

Icepaw stayed silent. *That fox didn't put up much of a fight,* he thought.

Mousetail nodded in agreement to Dawnpaw. "We must report back to camp immediately to tell Brightstar," he said, beginning to walk away from the clearing. "Let's go retrieve our prey."

They began to pad away in silence. Icepaw's pelt stung, just as he realized that the fox had scratched his chest slightly, hard enough to have him bleed. It stung against the cold, but he held his thoughts to himself, not wanting to sound like he was complaining. The whole Clan already gossiped too much about him.

Icepaw walked up to the spot where he buried his three mice. He dug it up and took the three by the tail in his mouth, happy to find out that it was still warm.

Mousetail padded in the front of the patrol. "Let's get moving," he said to Fireshade, Dewpaw, Dawnpaw and Icepaw. "We got to get to camp as soon as we can. Neither of us know when or if the fox is coming back."

"Alright," said Fireshade, as they walked swiftly back in the direction of the camp. They hadn't traveled that far, thankfully. Icepaw had already scented his Clanmtes. He followed everyone, keeping as a rear of the patrol.

Dawnpaw eagerly lashed her tail. "Volepaw won't be so happy that he missed out," she said, keeping her head high proudly with her prey that she caught. "He and Sweetpaw had to do apprentice duties all day!"

"Thankfully that isn't us," Dewpaw snorted.

"It *will* be us tomorrow, Dewpaw," sighed Icepaw. "Remember what Mousetail and Vinetail said?" Dewpaw groaned. "It isn't that bad, you know. Cutting moss for a whole moon taught me how to strike my blows so that I'd hit a cat rather than the air."

"But real battle training teaches you how to do your blows in the first place!" argued Dewpaw. "Sometimes I wish I were with you in that DarkClan battle. We would've beaten them!"

"What, would you being there change things?" snapped Icepaw, his eyes narrowing. "Well sorry for not knowing that you were MoonClan's best fighter!" Why did Dewpaw always have to bring up that DarkClan battle? Featherbreeze *died* that day . . . and every day it would tear Icepaw down. He would never stop grieving, but Dewpaw had seemed to get over it.

"Why so mad?" snarled Dawnpaw. "Just because you're jealous of Dewpaw doesn't mean you have to be so rude!"

"Me, jealous?" hissed Icepaw. "Well fine, I'm jealous to the *guts*. Everyday I seem to be falling apart all over again cause of that battle! Dewpaw can't understand—he didn't *see* her *die* in front of him. He didn't know the terror of being outnumbered so badly by cats who want to kill you! He will never know what I went through!"

Icepaw pushed passed them angrily. Why did Dewpaw have to ruin his days so much? Why did he steal all of Icepaw's friends? Why does he get the attention? There's no cat that Icepaw felt close to

anymore. He felt so alone.

"Icepaw, wait!" called Fireshade, running after Dewpaw.

Icepaw sped up, not wanting to talk to anyone. The only cat who would truly understand him right now in this moment would be Featherbreeze.

"Stop right now!" Fireshade called again, running up.

Icepaw stopped suddenly. "What?" he snarled, turning to look to Dawnpaw's mentor. The patrol went ahead of them, leaving the two alone. "I don't want to be bothered, if you haven't noticed."

Fireshade sighed. "Will you stop being so depressed, Icepaw?" he asked, dropping his vole. "I mean, it's leaf-bare and all . . ."

Duh!

"And the only things that should be on our mind is to hunt and feed our Clan," Fireshade added, "to make sure that they are on their paws. . . ." His voice faded, and he sighed. "Let's get back to camp."

He must've given up on talking to Icepaw, since he didn't reply. The two walked side by side back to camp in silence, holding their prey. Icepaw wanted to eat and go to sleep, forgetting that Featherbreeze died. Hee wanted to dream about her . . . and talk to her . . . to see her live again. But that was never going to happen. Perhaps he'd only see her in StarClan one day.

His thoughts whirled.

The camp entrance was just ahead. Icepaw padded quicker, wanting to get there as quick as possible to eat his share of the fresh-kill.

As soon as he got into camp, he could see Brightstar standing on top of her den. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" she called once the patrol had fully emerged into the clearing.

Icepaw shrugged, padding into camp and dropped his mice onto the fresh kill pile. Fireshade dropped his vole, and they both found

their places in the center of the camp.

"I've called you all together for two important announcements," she said, looking all around the camp. "One, we will be increasing patrols near CloudClan borders because of a roaming fox. Two, I have decided who will mentor Icepaw."

Icepaw froze. Really? He had came back from a bad day to this? He suddenly felt eager and nervous. He was finally going to get his own mentor! But what if was some cat who didn't mentor all that well? He wished he still had Ashtail.

Brightstar looked around the gathering of cats for a second. "Icepaw's new mentor will be me," she finally said.

Everyone froze and snapped their gazed toward him. He suddenly felt small in his own pelt, eyes wide.

The leader leaped off her den and padded over to Icepaw, closing the gap in between them touching noses. He accepted it—but was a bit uncertian about his mentor. He shouldn't be thinking like this! Being mentored by your leader was an honor!

"I promise . . . to work hard," he whispered.

Brightstar nodded. "That's good," she meowed, locking her blue eyes into his amber ones. "I will accept no less than that, Icepaw." She paused. "Training with me starts tomorrow. I don't think you have benifited much from being mentored by three cats at once."

"Yeah," Icepaw murmured breathlessly. *At least some cat understands . . .*

Chapter Fourteen

Edited ✔

Brightstar growled to Icepaw. "No, you're doing it all wrong!" his mentor scolded, padding up with her tail lashing.

The two were having their third training session—and from all those other private sessions, Icepaw learned that Brightstar was a tough mentor. He wished more than ever now that he still had Ashtail, even though Brightstar was the leader of MoonClan. Why did she push him this hard? Is this how her other apprentices were treated before him?

Icepaw nodded to his mentor and dipped his head. "I'm sorry, Brightstar." He looked back up to her, hoping she wasn't that mad. She always seemed to be angry at Icepaw.

"This is a very hard move, I know," meowed Brightstar with her powerful voice, "but if you don't know this move you will have a disadvantage in battle. No cat will get up and let you try it again, Icepaw." She looked impaitent with him. "Do it again."

"But I did it countless times!" Icepaw groaned, walking up slowly to the middle of the clearing. "Why do you push me so hard even though it takes days to learn something like this? I'm just an apprentice."

Brightstar's eyes blazed. "Don't talk back to me," she growled, glaring at him. "And I don't care whether you are an apprentice or not. I don't care how many moons you are or how small you can be, but I will push you as far as I need you to go to see when you will break."

Icepaw's jaws opened to respond, but he shut them again. *Why was Ashtail the only normal mentor I've ever had?* he wondered with annoyance.

"Now do it again," she ordered, stepping out of the way.

Icepaw sighed, and stood in the middle of the clearing. Brightstar nodded, a signal to begin, and he positioned himself. He hoped he did it right, or else Brightstar would stop him again and make him do it all over again. He crouched down, and then leaped high, flicking his hind legs into the air, and spun so he would land onto his forepaws. He reared up to Brightstar, pretending to rake her on the back, and then sprung to face her, but stumbled back on his paws.

Brightstar darted from her position, pinning down Icepaw with her forepaws onto his shoulders. He hissed at her, and grabbed her around her neck with both of his paws, pulling her close so he could nip on her nose, but already, she nipped his ear that was torn, making him yowl out in pain. She let him go, and he stumbled up, panting and shocked at her surprise attack.

Brightstar nodded to Icepaw and sat down, wrapping her tail neatly around her paws. "If you had done it right I would of not hurt you." Her eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "Perhaps you'll do better next time?"

"I'm trying!" growled Icepaw, getting up. He winced when his ear started to sting. He decided to ignore it. "Are you gonna make me do it again?"

Brightstar's ears twitched. "Yes. This time I will defend myself."

"But I didn't even get the move right," insisted Icepaw, looking into her blue eyes. Icepaw immediately realized that she was growing in gray fur. He wondered how old she was, or how many lives she had left.

"Well, the harder it gets, the more you practice, the easier you get it." Brightstar stood up, stretching her muscles. "Come on, go ahead."

He shook the sudden thought from his head. "Alright, Brightstar," Icepaw said with a groan.

She will push me to my limits, thought Icepaw, *until I break. I need a counter attack.* He looked around the surrounding, and saw the branches that hung over them from the lower trees. Nobody had ever used these branches before . . . but an idea came to his mind.

"Ready?" she asked, getting into position. Icepaw nodded and got into position as well, making sure his tail was close to his body. "Go!"

Icepaw leaped as soon as the word spit out, and sprung off his forepaws, flicking his hind legs in the sky again. He came back down, raking her back with sheathed claws, and she spun, hitting him in the face with a front paw blow. It hurt! He collapsed on the ground, and she charged at him, spitting with rage. Icepaw's eyes widened, as he quickly scrambled up.

The MoonClan leader leaped, paws outstretched to tackle down her apprentice again, but Icepaw sprang into the air, gripping hard onto the branches. He hauled himself up, which troubled him. The apprentices did not really get tree climbing lessons in the training hollow, for the tree branches were dangerous to use.

He looked down, heaving with all his effort. Brightstar looked up, and narrowed her eyes. As soon as she did, Icepaw leaped down onto her again, getting her down by squashing her onto her belly.

"Oof!" Brightstar said, coughing out air.

Icepaw sprung off of her. "Are you okay?" he asked, worried that he had hurt his mentor. He didn't want what happened to Ashtail to happen to Brightstar . . .

Brightstar rose to her paws, panting. "I'm fine," she said, and looked up the branches. "We've never done something like this before." She studied the area above. "But you only got up since the branches were low. What if you were in a real battle with higher branches? MoonClan warrior usually *climb* the tree, not hang on the branches. Also, you messed up with the move."

Icepaw growled to himself. Was nothing ever good enough for her? "Well sorry I did, but at least I got you!" He puffed out his chest in

pride. "The branches were the only resources I had so I used them."

Brightstar's tail lashed. "Good thinking."

"Thanks," Icepaw mewed, looking up to his leader with hope. Maybe she actually did see him with approval.

Brightstar looked back down, and she seemed to have noticed Icepaw's mood. "Well, I am not letting you off," she continued. "You *still* messed up on the new battle move."

"Fine," growled Icepaw.

Brightstar nodded. "I suppose we can take a break," she said with a shrug. "We've been working since dawn." They both looked up at the sun, which was mid-high. They had to return to camp soon, anyways.

He mumbled an agreement.

They walked out to the shade of the trees. Thin snow crunched underpaw—snow barely came into the training hollow at least. They've been having a leaf-bare full of snow. He sat under the tree, relaxed and at ease. Brightstar padded up beside him, her ears alert. Why was she always so tense?

Icepaw decided not to ask, and felt the warmth of his leader's breath on his ear tips. Brightstar was silent for a few moments, until a thrush flew from one tree to another, making her leap to her paws.

"Brightstar?" Icepaw asked, now getting nervous himself. "Are you okay?"

Brightstar watched the thrush fly high from one tree to another, quickly disappearing in a hole. She looked down to Icepaw. "I'm fine." She didn't sit down again.

Icepaw remained silent for a few seconds before looked back up to her. "Something bothering you?" he finally asked, wondering if were the wrong decision.

Brightstar's gaze shot down to him. "I said I am fine, Icepaw," she snapped. "Today's training is over. Let's get back to camp."

"Okay," he said awkwardly. "Let's get back then."

"Good." Brightstar began to lead him out of camp, her tail lashing and her ears pricked. "Tomorrow we can hunt. Today you can rest unless Vinetail has things for you to do."

Icepaw nodded, continuing to follow her. He was lost in thought. Why was she always this tense? Why were her eyes always on him? Why was she so tough with him? All these thoughts would always come when he was with her. Now to think of it, every cat in MoonClan would treat him as such. Were they still thinking about the Featherbreeze incident?

He looked down to his paws as they trudged through the pale forest. He looked back, leaving the training hollow behind him as they crouched down into the safety of the snow-covered dead bushes and trees. They were well hidden, with their light pelts blending in.

For some reason, he felt like he was being watched. Apparently, so did Brightstar.

She picked up her pace, forcing Icepaw to stay on her heels. Was this why she was so tense? Was there someone hunting down her? What about Icepaw? Brightstar always kept her eyes on him. Sudden fear rose in his chest. Camp wasn't far from the training hollow but they were nowhere near camp.

Suddenly, more pawsteps sounded, and Brightstar suddenly stopped. She looked over her shoulder and sniffed the air through open jaws. Suddenly, two more cats emerged from the bushes. They watched as they ran by. Icepaw suddenly realized it was Rainwhisker and Shadowheart!

Icepaw froze as Shadowheart looked at him in the eye. The two had never talked once since the day Featherbreeze died—he'd avoid going to patrols with Shadowheart, or even crossing paths. He averted his eyes and turned to Rainwhisker.

The dark gray tom was panting, his head low over his paws. Brightstar ran over to them. "What hppened?" she demanded, her tone lighter than usual.

Rainwhisker caught his breath "Grayfur's hurt. . . ." he panted, his voice trailing off.

Shadowheart padded up, seeming less tired. "We were attacked by something," he meowed, clawing the ground. "We didn't see it but it left before we got a glimpse."

Brightstar's eyes narrowed. "Take me to her. *Now*."

Shadowheart nodded, and began to run into the direction where the scene was. Rainwhisker and Icepaw trailed behind, with the other two in the front. As selfish as it seemed, Icepaw didn't really want to get near Shadowheart.

He followed in the rear, right by Rainwhisker. It seemed that they were by CloudClan's borders by the look of their direction. Icepaw wondered if he really wanted to go see Grayfur, too. He was tired of seeing hurt cats.

A huge fallen tree cut their path, and the patrol skidded to a hault. It towered over Icepaw, and he growled to himself.

"We're going over," Shadowheart explained, leaping on the bark and clawing deeply in. Icepaw wanted to reply, but he kept shut, and turned to Rainwhisker.

The tom nodded. "Go ahead, I'm coming with you."

"Thanks," Icepaw said. Rainwhisker nosed him up gently, giving the apprentice a boost up the tree. He climbed up, hauling himself to the top, and looked down to where Rainwhisker watched. "Coming?" he called down.

"Yes!" The gray warrior leaped up the bark, easily taking himself over. Shadowheart and Brightstar were already on the other side, running in the direction of where Grayfur might be. The CloudClan border scent rose, as well as blood.

Icepaw gasped, leaping down with Rainwhisker right beside him. The two ran, catching up to their leader. In the distance, a pale body lay on the ground, with blood pooling around.

No! he thought.

Icepaw crashed down to the warrior's side, and looked her in the eye. Mousewhisker and Dewpaw stood right beside the hurt she-cat, their eyes worried. Not a scratch lay on their pelts. Well, Dewpaw had a few. Grayfur was cringing in pain, with her mouth wide open. Blood bubbled out, and she coughed it out, revealing bite marks that no fox could of done on her neck.

"These marks were from a cat!" Brightstar hissed, clawing down in the ground. She looked all around the area, as if expecting a patrol of an enemy Clan to leap out of the bushes. Not a thing stirred.

Grayfur looked up, her eyes squinting with pain.

"Who did this to you?" Icepaw's leader demanded, her voice tougher than usual.

Graystripe's mouth opened, but she shut them again, coughing. Mousetail's paw rested on his throat. "It seems like she cannot talk," the senior warrior stated. "We have to get her to Vinetail as fast as we can. She's loosing too much blood."

"Blood is all we ever loose!" Brightstar growled, helping Grayfur up. She leaned right onto Mousewhisker for support, and her legs wobbled as if she was too tired to stand. Brightstar stood on the other side. "Let's go."

Shadowheart nodded, leading the patrol forward. Rainwhisker acted as a rear, while Dewpaw sighed, disappearing to the sides. Icepaw ran up to his brother, his eyes questioning. "What happened?" he whispered.

Dewpaw's head shot up, and his eyes widened. "N-nothing," the apprentice stammered. "I mean, a fox attacked. But the rest of us weren't there to see it."

"Oh," said Icepaw. It turns out Dewpaw hadn't really fought. "Hey,

why is your pelt covered in mud?"

"I fell in a pile," he explained.

"But there *is* no mud," Icepaw conceded. He looked around. "All that you can fall into is a plain pile of snow." The leaf-bare forest looked as frozen as ever. "Are you sure you fell in mud?"

Dewpaw's head snapped up. "You don't know what we did!"

Icepaw's head hung down. "Sorry," he said, his tone sharp. What was Dewpaw's problem? He continued on, his paws aching for some reason.

Dewpaw padded ahead to Shadowheart and Brightstar. Dewpaw guiltily looked at Grayfur—probably cause he wasn't swift enough to save the warrior. Icepaw would of felt bad as well. *I was never swift enough to save Featherbreeze.*

It's one of the worst feelings a warrior could ever have.

* * *

"I don't know who, or what, attacked me," Grayfur rasped in the leaders den. Now, they were back in camp, and Grayfur got the treatment she needed.

"What do you mean?" demanded Brightstar. Icepaw crouched down near the entrance of his mentor's den, evesdropping on the four cats inside. Grayfur, Brightstar, Sparrowheart and Vinetail talked within the thick rock, the small entrance being the only way for him to hear.

He heard Grayfur sigh. "I-it was all a blur," growled the senior warrior. "I was following some prey tracks. But as soon as I reached the scent, I saw a dead squirrel. Then suddenly, a small creature struck me, as fast as lightning!"

"So you don't know the pelt color?" Vinetail asked.

Grayfur was frustrated. "All I saw was darkness! Remembering it clearly is a blur—I hit my head too hard."

For a moment, the den was silent. "It was a trap," snarled Sparrowheart, breaking the quietness. "Dead prey would not be left there for no reason. It's leaf-bare and everyone's hungry . . . what a disadvantage."

Brightstar grunted of agreement. "Sparrowheart, I order you to send a patrol to investigate."

"Yes Brightstar." Paw steps were becoming loud, and he emerged from the entrance. He immediately looked down to Icepaw. "What are you doing here?" His eyes looked challenging.

Icepaw froze, and stared up at the deputy. *What do I say?* Icepaw panicked. Suddenly Silverkit ran up, panting. She batted Icepaw. "There, I caught you! Now you're it!" she squeaked, eagerly running away.

Icepaw was surprised. "Oh, err, I was hiding." He got up form his crouched spot. "This was a good place to take cover since I was upwind from her. So I . . . hid up here."

Sparrowheart sighed. "Hide-and-seek I suppose," meowed his father, looking up to the Clan. "Go on, I have some things to do."

Icepaw nodded, and scurried off to the direction Silverkit ran off to. He felt his father's gaze on his back as he chased after the kit, scenting her very easily inside the apprentice den. He crawled inside, to see her amazed. She looked all around the den.

"Wow!" she said. "It's so big! I wanna sleep here!"

Icepaw smiled. "When you are an apprentice," he pounted out, settling in his nest. "Oh, and thanks for what you did back there—"

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join in the clearing!" Sparrowheart called, his voice loud and clear. Icepaw bolted upright, leaving his spot. Even though this was a meeting not meant for Silverkit, she followed, her pelt close to his. The whole Clan, confused, padded to the clearing, the shade of the large mountain shielding them from the winds.

Sparrowheart sat in the middle of the large group, his tail lashing.

He looked around, seeing that every cat was here. He nodded of approval. "Alright, so I've called everyone here to announce something." Everyone listened to Sparrowheart closely.

"I wonder what he has to say," whispered Rainwhisker, who was right beside him.

Icepaw looked up to his father. It was probably about the creature that attacked.

He scanned the crowd. "There was an attack by CloudClan border," said the deputy. Shocked murmurs rose in the Clan, but some cats didn't seem to surprised. "I need a patrol to go over there and investigate, to possibly find something suspicious."

Rainwhisker stood taller. "I'll go," he offered immediately. Sparrowheart nodded of approval.

"I'll go too," said Mousewhisker. "Is it okay if I take Dewpaw?"

"Sure," meowed Sparrowheart, looking proudly down to his son.

Icepaw straightened up as well. "May I go, Sparrowheart?" he asked. "I'll be of good use."

Sparrowheart's eyes gleamed. "Yes, of course you may go." He motioned to the entrance. "All cats volenteering to come with me, go to the entrance of the camp."

After saying goodbye to Silverkit, he padded over to where the patrol gathered. Icepaw followed his father to the entrance, pressing close to him and Dewpaw. From the crowd of cats, murmurs rose once more. Finally, three more cats emerged; Sharpfang, Crowflight and Softpelt.

"Great," said Sparrowheart. "Let's go." He climbed through the entrance, and the patrol followed. Icepaw emerged last, his paws immediately sinking into the snow.

Oh StarClan, why are my Clanmates slowly getting hurt? he thought as he followed the patrol.

Chapter Fifteen

Edited ✔

Icepaw's scented the air, scouting all around the area. It was snowing again, and any sort of information that the patrol could possibly find about the attack on Grayfur would be hard.

He was close to his father as they looked around the trees a few tail lengths away from the CloudClan border. He turned to his father. "What if it was a patrol from their Clan?" he asked worriedly, motioning over the border.

Sparrowheart shook his head. "Nonsense." He sniffed hard on one patch of snow, and began to dig with his paws. "CloudClan and MoonClan aren't really much enemies right now. It's just quarrels with DarkClan that's going on."

Icepaw nodded, unsure. He helped his father dig in the ground, ignoring the cold feeling of the snow on his pelt and in between his paw pads. He also wanted to ask when they would be able to get back to camp, but didn't bother because he didn't want to sound like a kit. He sighed as he worked.

"What did you scent down here?" Icepaw wondered.

Sparrowheart looked up to the other cats, who were also digging. "I scented some blood," he replied. He turned back down to where they started working. "And maybe we can scent the cat who did it too."

There was a growl behind Icepaw, and he turned sharply to see Crowflight standing behind him. "I found something," he informed, pawing the ground.

Sparrowheart nodded. "Good work, Crowflight! Keep digging, Icepaw."

The MoonClan deputy trotted over to Crowflight and shoveled at the ground with him. Icepaw kept digging, but when he got to the bottom it turned out nothing was there, not even a clear scent of the cat who attacked Grayfur.

Sharpfang gasped, up ahead. "You're not going to believe this," he meowed, with a sharp glance to Icepaw. "It turns out that there's a cat betraying his own Clan!"

Icepaw trotted over. "What do you mean?" he asked, while adding, "Why are you looking at *me* like that?"

"Stop pretending like you know nothing!" Sharpfang hissed.

"I am not pretending anything!" Icepaw shot back, shocked that his own Clanmate would snap at him like that. What did *he* do to get Sharpfang's tail in a twist.

"I know what attacked Grayfur," he continued. "No fox, badger or any cat from another Clan."

Sparrowheart padded up curiously. "Well, spit it out, Sharpfang," Icepaw's father urged. "I need every information I possibly can get." His eyes were narrowed.

Sharpfang trotted over, carrying tufts of fur. "I found this." He dropped it in front of Sparrowheart. "They're Icepaw's. It was *him* who had attacked Grayfur!"

Icepaw's neck fur bristled. "What?" he demanded. "I would never do something like that!"

Sparrowheart looked curious but a bit aggravated. "My son wouldn't do that, he's right!" he meowed, calmer than Icepaw had been. "What if Icepaw had been here, but hasn't attacked Grayfur?"

Crowflight emerged from behind Sparrowheart. "I think Sharpfang's right," he commented, glaring down to Icepaw as well. "Grayfur was attacked by a cat of MoonClan, you know. There's no other scent of anything *except* for MoonClan."

Dewpaw ran up, fearfully in Icepaw's defense. "Icepaw was battle-

training with Brightstar," he meowed, his voice low. "It couldn't of possibly been him."

Sharpfang growled and stalked away without another word. Icepaw cast a grateful glance to his brother, but he still couldn't believe that his own Clanmates would turn him over like that. Did they have something against Icepaw? He sighed and looked down to his paws, angry.

The patrol returned to camp with no evidence. Dewpaw immediately stalked into the apprentice den, where he was greeted by Volepaw and Dawnpaw. Icepaw sighed and walked elsewhere, keeping to himself.

Ashtail waved his tail to his former apprentice, and Icepaw smiled warmly, still keeping to himself. He limped away, only to be then greeted by Softpelt and Rainwhisker. He took a tired breath and lied down, enjoying the warm sun. Leaf-bare was not near it's end, and this was the warmest of sun he felt in a while.

He felt something heavy on his back, and he groaned. Silverkit squeaked as she batted Icepaw. "Come on, let's play!" she meowed excitedly.

Icepaw shook her off. "I'm too tired, Silverkit."

Silverkit scowled. "Fine, you big sack of lazy bones," she said, resting besides him. For a few moments, it was quiet until Silverkit ran her mouth again. "Hey, do you know that the other warriors are talking about you?"

"Which warriors?" Icepaw asked, suddenly interested.

Silverkit pointed to a group with her tail. A small group consisting of Sharpfang, Crowflight, and two others he couldn't make out. They were in the dark, and their faces were turned away from him so he couldn't see them.

"Oh, them," he said, lying down again. "Let them. They think I ambushed Grayfur." His eyes shut again.

Another presence ran over—Silverkit's brother. "You wouldn't do

that!" Squirrelkit gasped.

"I *didn't* attack *anyone*." *Not since the day after Featherbreeze's death, that is*. Icepaw yawned and turned over, letting the sun hit his belly. It felt nice.

"Good," Silverkit meowed. "I don't want a murderous mentor!"

"I want him to be *my* mentor!" growled Squirrelkit.

"I already called him," Silverkit insisted. "Right, Icepaw, you'll mentor me?"

"That's for Brightstar to decide," Icepaw said, with his eyes still shut. Squirrelkit leaped and landed on top of his belly. "Oof!"

"Please tell Brightstar you want to mentor *me,*" Squirrelkit went on, stepping all over him. "Pleaaaase!"

Icepaw's eyes opened. Great StarClan, he just wanted to rest! He groaned and got up. "Again, that is for Brightstar only to decide," he meowed before stalking off to the apprentice den. *And I'm not even a warrior yet.*

"Great, you chased him off, Squirrelkit!" Silverkit growled behind him.

"Did not!" Squirrelkit protested, before he heard the two growling and playfighting. He sighed. Those kits were making him grow old already! If only Ripplefur were here, they wouldn't pay too much attention to him. He wished she were here anyways, as well as his mother and Spottedkit.

He walked in the den, his tail lashing.

"Hi, Icepaw!" Dawnpaw meowed eagerly.

"Hey," Volepaw added in addition to Dawnpaw's greeting.

Icepaw yawned and rested in his nest. "Hi . . ." he closed his eyes, not wanting to be disturbed. The voices of the other apprentices were blocked out of his head immediately.

Icepaw's eyes opened again, and he found himself somewhere else once more. He sighed with relaxation. It was a warm sunny day—-all the leaf-bare snow was gone. The sun made his pelt feel warm through the trees and he lie down, even more relaxed than before. Wherever he was, this was perfect.

But suddenly, he heard a loud meow in the distance. A she-cat was running up, her tail lashing. "Icepaw!" she called.

He looked up, and saw a gray she-cat with light blue eyes coming towards him. She reminded him of the cat from the Twilight Forest who saved his life when he was a kit. Oh great. Now he couldn't possibly rest.

She ran up to him and stood above him. "Get up, this is no time to be dozing off like that," she meowed, nudging him with her paw.

Icepaw groaned and got up. "Now what?" he asked.

Her eyes darkened with disappointment. "Icepaw, you are in StarClan," he meowed. "And I summoned you here to share a message.

He froze. "Why?"

"You can't forget about the prophecy," she meowed as the sky became darker. Icepaw held his breath, and stared at her, confused. "*The darkness was never meant to be, and two cats, high and proud, will lead and destroy.*"

As she faded away, Icepaw's pelt rippled with alarm. *Isn't that Flamepaw's prophecy?*

* * *

Icepaw padded into Vinetail's den, and stood at the entrance. For once, he decided, he's going to do something about this prophecy. He didn't want to stand, knowing that there was some kind of darkness rising. It's been moons since he's thought about it, and now that tragedies kept striking, something must be done. He took a deep shaky breath.

Vinetail looked up, and immediately saw him. "Oh, hi Icepaw!" he meowed in his usual cheery tone. "You're not usualy here. Is there anything you needed?"

Icepaw was silent for a moment. *Vinetail is a medicine cat! Maybe he has some answers.*

"I-I needed to talk," he began, trying to keep his voice low. "About a dream I had."

Vinetail nodded. "Do you want Brightstar to come, too?" he asked. "This can be important."

Icepaw didn't think about telling Brightstar anything. If he told her, would she act differently towards him? He sighed and nodded. "Sure."

"Let's meet her now."

Icepaw followed Vinetail out of the medicine den, and walked towards the leader's den. Brightstar was dozing in her nest, hidden away from the snow of the leaf-bare weather. Some leader she was, being lazy all day while her Clan worked their whiskers off for prey!

Vinetail touched his cold nose to her ear. "Brightstar," he said, nudging her until she was awake.

Their leader's eyes immediately opened. They were clouded with a feeling Icepaw couldn't identify. She looked up to Vinetail, but bolted up when she saw Icepaw. "Oh," she meowed, straightening her fur. "I didn't know I'd be visited like this today."

Icepaw's pelt burned with annoyance.

"Is there anything you two need?" she asked them, looking straight to Icepaw.

Vinetail nodded. "Yes," he meowed. "Icepaw mentioned something 'bout having some dream. Right, Icepaw?"

Icepaw looked up to Brightstar, and eyed her back. "Yes. It seemed

rather important."

Brightstar suddenly looked interested. "Alright," she said, beckoning the two forward. "If it's important, it shouldn't be overheard by anyone."

Icepaw gratefully walked out of ear-shot from any of his Clanmates, and padded over to Brightstar so their pelts brushed a bit. She yawned, and wiped her face with her paw, rubbing the sleep away. Vinetail waited patiently in front of the two.

"You may start explaining, Icepaw," Vinetail meowed gently with a nod.

Icepaw nodded back. "StarClan visited me in my dreams," he began with his voice low. Vinetail's neck fur bristled. "A gray she-cat with blue eyes spoke with me. She said she summoned me there . . . because of something terrible that's going to happen."

Brightstar's tail tip twitched. "Terrible?"

Icepaw sighed. "I don't know. It sounded terrible."

"What did she tell you?"

Icepaw looked back and forth to Brightstar and Vinetail. "She gave me a prophecy. *The darkness was never meant to be, and two cats, high and proud will lead and destroy.*" He finished it off like that. No one said anything.

Finally, Vinetail cracked the silence. "It doesn't sound too good," he agreed. "Darkness and all."

Brightstar nodded her head. "Is that all?" she asked Icepaw.

"Yes," he responded.

Her leader gave a deep sigh. "I think I know one part of the prophecy," she murmured. "It involves you, Icepaw. StarClan would of sent it to Vinetail, but they chose you for a reason. You are one of those two cats."

Icepaw bristled. "Me?"

"Yes. You."

Vinetail growled a little. "Icepaw . . . darkness is rising," he said again. "That's a point of the prophecy. Brightstar, we're going to have to protect MoonClan, I mean, *really* protect it now."

"No," Brightstar said. "What we need is answers."

Icepaw stared at her hard. "I don't think StarClan is going to tell me answers!"

Vinetail sighed. "I will ask StarClan once I go to the Night Flower in a few days." He shut his eyes. "And Icepaw? Don't tell anyone about this, not even Dewpaw, your father or friends. Keep it a secret . . . Some cats don't handle things like that very well."

Icepaw opened his mouth to protest, but shut it again. *How can I keep quiet about something like this?!*

Authors Note #2

So, I apologize in advance for my big delay of posts. Lately, I haven't found the time to write it because school is here (-.-) and I haven't been using my laptop for a while, which is surprising xD. So, I'll let you all know that the next chapter (I possibly will post two since I am sincerely sorry) is going to come out in a few days, like Sunday or Tuesday.

Also, thanks for the support my book has been getting . . . I really thank you :D almost 150 votes! But guys, I NEED MORE COMMENTE O.O Please?? :3 anyways see you all later.

~L.TC

Chapter Sixteen

Edited ✔

Icepaw padded through the MoonClan forest, his pelt dotted with white. Soft, wet snow gently floated down from the clouds and onto Icepaw and the rest of the forest, thickening the sheet of white even more. The trees were naked and bare, with snow layering it's thick, strong branches.

Brightstar padded in front as the head of the patrol, with Sharpfang, Swiftbreeze, Fireshade and Dawnpaw following very close behind. Everyone was quiet, and everyone was pressed close enough to each other that they could hear each other breathing. They were nearing CloudClan borders. Icepaw was alert, because they were still fairly close to DarkClan.

Brightstar turned in front of the patrol. "Okay, we're spreading out. I'll take Icepaw and Dawnpaw to do this side," she meowed, looking up at Fireshade for approval. Of course, he nodded to his leader. "And the rest of you will start from that tree." She pointed with her tail over to a large, naked dead birch covered with a lot of snow.

"Yes Brightstar," Swiftbreeze said, trotting over to the other side with Fireshade and Sharpfang following. Sharpfang, before he left, cast Icepaw a glance of disgust, and turned over to the group.

Icepaw's pelt bristled. *What's his problem?* he thought angrily. *I did nothing to my Clanmates! Why would he think I would harm Grayfur?*

Everyone was still trying to solve the mystery of the cat who had attacked Grayfur a little while ago. It bugged Icepaw miserably since a few cats thought it was him who did it—but thankfully, it's getting forgotten since Grayfur was back on her paws.

Dawnpaw padded ahead and began to mark one tree over to a bush, while Icepaw walked around the area, scouting all around. He stopped in his tracks, scenting something he hadn't smelled in a

while. A rabbit! He didn't have one of those for moons ever since he caught his first one and received those scratches!

Icepaw opened his jaws wide, sniffing the air. He knew this was not a hunting patrol, but MoonClan was starving.

He crouched down, beginning to pad forward with his tail almost dragging behind him. He hoped his stomach growls wouldn't be heard and drive the rabbit away. He could see it's ears twitching. But suddenly, with paws outstretched, Sharpfang pounced onto it, biting it hard on the neck before Icepaw got a chance to go at it.

"Hey!" Icepaw growled. "I was gonna hunt that!"

Sharpfang dropped the dead rabbit on the ground and turned to him. "Oh, didn't see you there, Icepaw," he meowed, his eyes narrowed.

"Yeah, *sure* you didn't," he snorted. "I was hunting here first."

"Well I caught it, okay? Don't be such a kit about it! I have a better chance at catching prey than you, so at least be thankful I am helping to feed you and the rest of the Clan." He buried his prey under a bush, and left it at that, going back to the borders.

Icepaw's tail lashed. How dare he! Sharpfang may not like him but he did not have to be annoying about it. Icepaw sighed to himself, and padded back to his side of the MoonClan border, helping Dawnpaw mark.

She looked worried. "What was that about?" she asked him.

"Nothing. Some cats just don't like me. That doesn't really matter though." He looked up, over the DarkClan and CloudClan borders.

"Icepaw, you shouldn't go snapping at other cats like that, it's rude to your Clanmates," she mewed, casting a swift glance at him.

"I didn't snap at him," Icepaw murmured.

He froze, suddenly seeing a cat pad out of the trees. She was a gray she-cat with deep black tabby markings, and unforgettable leaf

green eyes. Her fur was shaggy and messy, and her claws were fully extended. *Fallentail!* The memory of the fight he had with Fallentail crowded in his mind, as well as the battle with the DarkClan patrol, the death of Featherbreeze and the following deaths of Ripplefur and Spottedkit.

He remembered the rage he felt. The horror of it swept through his mind as he stared at Fallentail coming closer and closer. No one else seemed to notice her. It must only be Icepaw.

She leaned close to his ear, blocking out all other sounds, and whispered: "The darkness is gonna swallow you whole, Icepaw . . ."

His eyes widened. *The prophecy!*

"Beware, you stupid fool, the darkness is coming for you!" she hissed again, her claws extending more, making Icepaw's paws ache. "It's so close . . . so close now . . . it's waiting to strike."

"No . . . no it's not!" he growled, backing up.

"Icepaw? What are you talking about? Are you even listening to me?" Dawnpaw meowed, standing in front of him. When Icepaw didn't respond, she growled of frustration. "Icepaw!"

Brightstar immediately appeared at his side. "Icepaw," she gasped. "What's wrong?"

Slowly, Icepaw shook his head. "I-I'm fine," he managed with a gulp. Fallentail disappeared, her glowing green eyes fading the last, as if a warning that she was watching him. He looked at Brightstar, her eyes were round with worry. Ever since he had that dream, cats haunted him every day and night about the darkness that was coming and Brightstar, knowing about it, kept a close eye on him.

As soon as he began to mark borders again, faint hissing sounded over CloudClan. Icepaw made out a small CloudClan patrol on their territory, with a big DarkClan patrol surrounding them. He tensed. "Brightstar, look!"

Brightstar's head shot up, and she gazed over the border to see the two patrols arguing or something, with claws outstretched, teeth

bared and fur bristling. One cat from DarkClan jumped, pinning down a small CloudClan cat and began to scratch at his muzzle. Then, a fight broke out.

Brightstar thought for a moment, silent, and then hissed, "Come on!"

She ran over the border, with Dawnpaw following her. Icepaw was hesitant before he crossed onto CloudClan lands. Sharpfang, Fireshade and Swiftbreeze followed quickly as they neared the fighting cats.

Brightstar stopped, but nobody seemed to notice the MoonClan cats. Finally, she got their attention by yowling out to them. "What's going on here! Can't a patrol have a decent border around here?"

Finally, the cats broke apart and looked at them. A CloudClan cat bristled. "More trespassers?" she hissed. She was a muscular brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes. Icepaw immediately recognized her as the deputy of CloudClan, Echoleaf.

"We are not *trespassing*—we are only avoiding trouble," Brightstar replied curtly. Then, she turned to the DarkClan cats. It was surprising that the patrol leader was no cat Icepaw had ever met, but behind him, he easily spotted Flamepaw, ducked behind the crowd of cats. He remembered as well that Flamepaw knew about the prophecy of darkness. "Now *what* is going on?"

"They randomly attacked us!" spat Echoleaf. "They're all out to get us! First they steal our prey and now they attack. It's like they're so desperate they want to eat us too."

"We have enough prey!" spat a DarkClan cat.

"Oh, do you?" Echoleaf challenged.

"Then leave us alone!" hissed a small CloudClan she-cat. "You and your Clan are nothing but trouble!"

"Silence!" hissed Brightstar, padding closer.

"You have no right to be here, Brightstar!" a DarkClan tom growled.

"Why don't *you* silence?"

"You're the ones who trespassed first! And plus, these boundaries are DarkClan, MoonClan and CloudClan, flank to flank to flank. So if something is wrong and we just want peace—-I *will* enforce it." Her tail lashed.

"All of you, get off our territory!" Echoleaf ordered, standing prouder and taller.

"Make us," hissed the patrol leader of DarkClan. "We are at war with MoonClan already. Why not have our first battle—right here and now?"

Brightstar tensed, and Icepaw's fur bristled. A battle with DarkClan on CloudClan's territory? This was a difficult decision. He knew that if Brightstar turned down the challenge she would look weak, but if she fought them and lost she would look foolish. Or maybe she would win and the other cats would think she had too much pride?

"Look, we are avoiding conflict," she explained. "I do not want to fight any cat." Then, her claws extended. "But if you *dare* threaten my Clan, I will personally rip every one of you're throats out. I will not hesitate to protect them!"

"I'm going to attack MoonClan if you don't fight us then," he growled back. "I'll kill every cat in your Clan there is, starting by ripping away their precious leader's remaining lives!"

He charged from his spot, and swiped at Brightstar with vicious long claws. She leaped out of the way immediately, and doubled back, hissing. "I guess that means a fight. MoonClan, attack!"

Icepaw was hesitant at first, but he charged anyways. "CloudClan, advance!" Echoleaf called, charging forward too. This time, the fight was evenly matched. Two smaller patrols against one large patrol—Icepaw knew this was fair. *This* is what was suppose to happen on that fight where his mother died! His belly filled with nearly the same amount of rage from last time just thinking of how DarkClan ruined part of his life. He would not fall back without the blood of his enemies on his paws.

With a furious battle call, he leaped onto a DarkClan apprentice, pinning him down. It was Toadpaw, some cat he'd seen from thelast gathering. He hadn't gotten along with Toadpaw well, and he stayed with his Clan at that time.

"You!" Toadpaw hissed. "I've seen you before!"

Icepaw growled in response. "This is not a conversation, Toad*kit,* this is a battle!"

"Don't you dare do that to my name!" he yowled with fury, pouncing on Icepaw. All Brightstar's intense training came back into his mind. He knew he had to use those moves now. He furiously swiped at Toadpaw, cutting deep into the apprentice's face with his sharp claws. That would leave a scar. He yowled in pain as blood dripped down his face. He growled again, coming closer. Toadpaw was obviously younger, but he was surely strong to take that.

"I am going to be generous, and I will let you go," he growled.

"DarkClan never gives up!" Toadpaw insisted, leaping at Icepaw. He gasped and his eyes widened as Toadpaw had him pinned in an instant. He bit hard into Icepaw's shoulder, but Icepaw scratched his belly in return. The two fought with their claws fully extended. He struggled to push Toadpaw off, until he finally kicked him off. He smiled with satisfaction, and attacked him again with all the anger he could muster, blowing scratches and bites to him.

Toadpaw struggled out of Icepaw's grasp, and panted. "Fine!" he yowled, backing up. The two toms were covered with scratches.

Icepaw snarled and turned back to the battle. It looked like his side was winning. *The first battle of the war*, he thought.
But his thoughts broke apart as soon as he spotted Flamepaw nearing, with his eyes blazing. He looked ready to fight. Icepaw growled and got into a fighting position.

Flamepaw stopped in his tracks. "Icepaw," he meowed.

"No," Icepaw hissed. "We are here to battle. Not to be friends or to talk, Flamepaw." His anger was rising as Featherbreeze's voice

began to whisper in his head.

Flamepaw's expression was hurt. "Icepaw . . ." he insisted, padding a little closer.

"I'll shred DarkClan!" Icepaw hissed again, his ears flattening and his voice challenging. "Don't come any closer. You'll make me do something I am going to regret!"

Flamepaw took steps closer. "Icepaw, listen—"

Instantly, he already leaped, cutting Flamepaw off. He'd warned him! He wrestled his only DarkClan friend down with all his strength—which was very difficult—until he had Flamepaw pinned under him so he could not move. Icepaw was snarling, his teeth bared, claws fully extent, and his eyes blazing. "Every time I see a DarkClan cat, I feel enraged!" he yowled at the top of his lungs.

Flamepaw looked sympathetic. "I don't want to fight!" he insisted.

"Flamepaw! What are you talking about? Rip him to shreds! Sandstar will make you a warrior!" growled a large, dark brown tabby apprentice. "Avenge Fallentail! Avenge her; Icepaw was the one who killed her!"

Icepaw snarled. "I would not have killed Fallentail unless she hadn't murdered my mother!" he shouted. "I am not going to be shredded! It's you who mentions that foul name, you piece of cold fox-dung!" He let go of Flamepaw and landed on the other apprentice, already ripping at his pelt.

"Mudpaw!" Flamepaw gasped.

Flamepaw shoved Icepaw off of his Clanmate, who's pelt was now covered in blood. He looked deeply injured, and Icepaw hadn't even given him the chance to fight back. Brightstar immediately emerged at his side. She was shocked, but she looked like she was trying to push it away.

"Icepaw, it's over. The first battle was won," she meowed in his ear. At the same time, the DarkClan patrol was retreating. "Calm down, Icepaw. This battle is over. No more bloodshed."

He looked to his paws. Yet again, his grief and aggressions had to be calmed down by another cat. He looked up to the bright and snowy sky. Featherbreeze must not be watching over him. He must be too vicious to be under StarClan's blessing.

He wished he hadn't done that to Mudpaw.

Chapter Seventeen

Edited ✔

The moon was completely full tonight, yet it was dim. The gathering place was darker than usual, as if the darkness of the prophecy was at the very edge of the tree leaves, hiding behind the massive oaks, waiting for Icepaw to come close enough so it can grab him. He sat by two CloudClan apprentices, one StreamClan apprentice and one MarshClan apprentice. Dawnpaw was right beside him.

"So I was there when the fight with DarkClan broke out," Flarepaw explained, his tail lashing excitedly. "We were so badly outnumbered, too! But CloudClan never ever gave up, and we fought them off and won!"

"Wow," said Silkpaw, the StreamClan apprentice.

"What bravery! Me and my Clanmates would knock them off their paws whole," laughed Frogpaw, the MarshClan apprentice.

Dawnpaw's tail lashed. "Humph. CloudClan would of lost without the help of MoonClan," she boasted. "DarkClan tend to travel large. They were fortunate we were there."

"I'm sure any Clan would've need help," mumbled Icepaw.

"MarshClan needs no cat to back them up!" Frogpaw insisted.

"StreamClan stands alone too!" declared Silkpaw. "No cat may get in *our* way as long as we live."

Icepaw looked over his shoulder, to the entrance of the gathering place. Everyone was still waiting for DarkClan, but for a while now, no cat of their Clan had made an appearence.

Dawnpaw got up from her spot, and began to walk in a different direction, over to more MoonClan cats. "C'mon Icepaw," she

meowed. "Dewpaw's waiting."

Grateful, Icepaw nodded. "Bye, everyone. I-I'll see you sometime," he mewed, following his Clanmate down the narrow ways. Cats crowded the gathering place, even when DarkClan wasn't there yet. Icepaw hated small spaces ever since he had went into the cave of mosses for the second time. A river of blood had haunted him that day when he fell in the undergrownd pool below the hidden tunnels, and for some reason, he felt his lungs were suffocating in blood all over again from the crowded clearing.

He looked up to the black sky—at least the stars still shone tonight. It seemed like they were shining brighter without the moon's light. The thought of StarClan watching over Icepaw comforted him in many ways, it made him feel a bit better.

"Icepaw!" someone called, trotting up. It was obviously Dewpaw. "Hey, Ice!"

Icepaw turned. He saw his brother padding up eagerly. "Yes?" Icepaw asked him.

"Hey, let's sit by each other," he went on. "I asked Mousetail to save us two spots in the front of everyone."

Icepaw shrugged. "Sure, I don't mind."

"Great!" his brother mewed enthusiastically. "Icepaw, cheer up, will you? There's nothing to be sad about, we're at a gathering!" He began to pad forward, leaving Icepaw to follow him.

No reason to be sad? he thought in response. *I'll give you several reasons, you big traitor!* Why did Dewpaw not care about Featherbreeze or Ripplefur or Spottedkit anymore? Didn't Ashtail's wounds affect Dewpaw? Didn't the anger of losing in battle fill his brother's heart? Didn't *he* recieve bad dreams every night?

Icepaw, please, listen to Dewpaw, Featherbreeze's voice whispered in his mind. Icepaw was sure it was his own subconscious disciplining himself. There's no way StarClan would be able to talk to someone other than a medicine cat. *It's been moons since I have died. Every cat*

lives and dies eventually. Get over it . . . don't live in your past, Icepaw.

This made his claws scrunch to the ground as he sat down in his spot that Dewpaw had saved. This was *not* what he wanted. He wanted to be left alone from these cats! He wished there were no StarClan existing, then prophecies would not exist either.

Stoneheart, the gray tabby deputy of MarshClan, stood high upon the rocks. "Listen!" she called, her young and wild eyes burning brightly. "DarkClan have taken far too long to come to our gathering tonight. We decided we will start without them."

Murmurs of shock rose among the crowds. Icepaw's bristled fur relaxed a bit. DarkClan most likely will not be coming tonight. That was in his opinion. But everyone else looked worried.

"Will StarClan be angry?"

"Will they take away the moon?"

"Is DarkClan planning something?"

"Silence!" Stoneheart called again. "No words about DarkClan will be said furthur on when or if they come. Now, I will be the first speaker, as I have important news."

"Go ahead," Brightstar meowed, dipping her head. Lakestar and Swiftstar nodded of appoval as well, backing up to give Stoneheart the space she needed on the rock.

"As some may know," Stoneheart began, "Our faithful leader, Rabbitstar, had lost his ninth life two days ago." There was a long pause as if every cat was taking a moment of silence for him. *Rest well in StarClan,* Icepaw thought, wondering if a new star appeared on the sky two days ago. "So, I have become Stonestar," she continued, sitting down comfortably. "My new deputy will be Berryheart. He has been an honorable cat for many moons, and many moons to come."

"Berryheart! Berryheart!" everyone cheered. Icepaw even cheered himself, because he knew if it were him up there, he'd want every cat to cheer for him.

"And," Stonestar meowed. "We have a new apprentice. His name is Frogpaw, and he's here with us tonight." She gestured her tail to where Frogpaw sat, his chest puffed out proudly.

"Frogpaw! Frogpaw!" everyone chanted once more. Icepaw felt glad for his new friend. So tonight had been his first gathering.

"This concludes my announcements for tonight." Stonestar sat back in her place next to Brightstar and Lakestar. Swiftstar shrugged and padded forward, and the leaders respectively remained in their spots.

The large black tom sat on the front of the rock, and looked down to all Clans. "I am going next." No rejections. "So, CloudClan had been doing very well. We just have been attacked the other day by DarkClan cats." Some CloudClan cats growled of anger, and the other Clans looked surprised. "But, I have to admit that without MoonClan's help, we would of not made it out in one piece. Thanks to us working together, we have defeated them in battle."

Everyone cheered. Not many cats must like DarkClan.

"And," he went on, "Due to the bravery of an apprentice of my Clan, she had become a warrior, now named Featherfall."

"Featherfall! Featherfall!" everyone cheered.

It's like Featherbreeze, he thought sadly.

Featherfall was a beautiful brown tabby she-cat with crisp amber eyes, a cat he had seen the day of the fight. She seemed to be a good fighter. Her skills were impressive, sure, but he could not actually *clearly* remember her. He never had heard of a cat named Featherpaw in the past.

Swiftstar sighed from his short speech and sat back down in his spot. Brightstar stepped up, guessing that he had finished. Lakestar nodded of approval to her, and she dipped her head in response, calling down to the Clans.

"So, I will start off by saying that MoonClan had grown tough during this rough leaf-bare," she said. "That we are ready to fend off

any cat who threatens us. I will also say that I will be extending our border patrols. DarkClan may not be here to know, but I will let the other three Clans know. Any cat, if not nessesary, that steps over our borders, will be shredded if a threat or taken to our camp to be escorted later back to their own camps."

Lakestar's tail tip twitched. "And why is that, Brightstar?" he asked.

"Because we want to show DarkClan that they do not own the other Clans," she growled, mostly to herself. "I'm tired of them being stuck up to us. So I will be tough on *every* cat, especially those fools!"

"I completely agree with you," Swiftstar rose up. "I will do the same. Especially since DarkClan targets us the most."

"Well, they would not have to target us if it weren't for Icepaw and Dewpaw," growled Sharpfang, who was more towards the middle of the clearing.

Icepaw's head shot up. "What?" he snarled.

Brightstar cast him a sharp glance. "Sharpfang!"

"It's true! If it weren't for their mother—"

"Featherbreeze did nothing wrong!" spat Icepaw, his fur bristling up again. All his scratches began to sting again. Feeling began to be brought back to his scars, and anger rose in his chest.

"Sharpfang, shut your mouth!" ordered Brightstar, her tail lashing. "Icepaw is right, Featherbreeze has nothing to do with this!"

Dewpaw's eyes were wide with surprise. "Icepaw, calm down!" he whispered, resting his tail on his brother's back. Slowly, Icepaw sat down again, his anger being calmed as well. "You don't want the other Clans to think we are crazy."

"It's not me, it's Sharpfang! He hates me now for some reason! That's not fair!" he whispered back angrily.

Dewpaw sighed, shook his head, and looked back up to Brightstar. The other leaders were bristling, and so was she.

"Anyways, moving on . . ." she mewed, calming herself down as well. "Our Clan is well. Silverkit and Squirrelkit are growing up fine, and so are our other kits. All is very well."

* * *

Icepaw was relieved to finally get back to camp. The night was cold, much colder than the day times, and he badly needed his rest. But, as soon as he put paw into the camp, everything looked like chaos. Volepaw was searching all around in the nursery with Nightrose, and her three kits were laying in the elder's den, their fur bristled, as the two elders comforted and protected them.

Shadowheart, who was left in charge, ran up to Brightstar immediately after he had seen her. Icepaw looked down to his paws, not wanting to look at him.

"What happened?" demanded Brightstar.

"It's Silverkit and Squirrelkit!" he gasped. "DarkClan has taken them!"

"What?" Brightstar growled. She pushed past him, but he still followed her. Icepaw followed the two of them as well. "Tell me what's going on!"

"We aren't sure about it, but we had scented DarkClan. We think that they're hiding somewhere, or maybe they fled the camp, but I don't know. All we know is that the kits are gone!" Shadowheart explained.

"Send three cats to look for them," Brightstar ordered.

"Already done. I sent Softpelt, Adderclaw and Bluewing just a while ago."

"Tell everyone to search the camp!"

"Volepaw is looking in the nursery, Ashtail is checking the apprentice den, Vinetail and Sweetpaw are in the medicine den and everyone else is looking everywhere else."

"Did you check *my* den?"

"Yes."

"The tunnel?"

"Yes!"

"Around the camp?!"

"Yes, Brightstar, we checked everywhere!"

"So DarkClan probably has them!" growled Brightstar. "We have to go get them!"

Sparrowheart ran up, his eyes tired and fur shaggedy. "But Brightstar, everyone is tired tonight . . . and DarkClan is too big. We need a proper plan to get them back, we cannot just charge to get them."

"But you don't know what they can do to Silverkit and Squirrelkit!" Icepaw meowed, standing up in Brightstar's place. "We *have* to get them back if we can't find them!"

"Wait," Brightstar meowed. "Sparrowheart, keep talking."

Icepaw looked at her with disbelief. *What?* Was she just gonna let the two harmless kits there, *hoping* that they would not *die*? Why couldn't they just get Silverkit and Squirrelkit back? They owed it to Ripplefur! They had to get them back!

Sparrowheart nodded. "The gathering had tired out most of our warriors, and we already have search parties out. If Silverkit and Squirrelkit merely left the camp, the patrols will be back before or by dawn with Silverkit and Squirrelkit. If they do not return with them, a fully revised plan will be made out, and it will be easier to think because our heads would have enough sleep. We cannot cause problems with DarkClan without sufficient evidence."

Brightstar sighed. "Alright, Sparrowheart. You are a good deputy of mine. I trust your judgement."

Sparrowheart dipped his head. "Thank you."

The MoonClan leader turned to her Clan, and raised her head. Her voice was loud over all the murmers. "Listen up! Keep your eyes, ears and noses sharp! By dawn, if they have not returned, we will take immediate action!" she announced before returning to her den with Sparrowheart following close behind.

Icepaw's neck fur bristled. Dewpaw was right beside him, and he swiftly turned to his brother. "How dare they! We have to make sure nothing bad happens to Silverkit and Squirrelkit, Dewpaw!"

Dewpaw shrugged. "There's nothing *we* can do," he pointed out.

Icepaw looked down. Dewpaw was right. There was nothing Icepaw could do right now . . . but there was something he would do when everyone was asleep. If nobody will help him, this mission will be his own weight to carry on his shoulders.

* * *

Dawn was far from coming, yet Icepaw felt fully rested. The cold, yet dark and early morning was crisp. Icepaw could not see much except for the white snow and frost that hung onto trees and dead bushes. It twinkled brightly, standing out.

Before his Clan woke up, he was determined to save Silverkit and Squirrelkit. He's going to keep the two safe from any harm—make sure they won't ever get hurt, and safely return and forget about what those treacherous DarkClan cats did.

After moments of thought and travel, he was close to the borders. The DarkClan stench hung heavy.

He sniffed the air, and he smelled a fresh scent of Silverkit and Squirrelkit. This scent lead over the DarkClan borders, followed by more DarkClan scents . . . and a tang of . . . *Dewpaw*?

He saw his brother's white pelt over the DarkClan border in the shade of a tree, making him hard to point out. Icepaw ran up to him. "Dewpaw!" he called in a low whisper-voice.

Dewpaw swiftly turned his head and emerged from the shadows. Since the sky was still dark it looked almost pitch black down there. "Icepaw?" he asked, tilting his head. "What are you doing here?"

Icepaw kept his voice down. "I was going to save Silverkit and Squirrelkit," he replied. *And I will try and find Flamepaw*, Icepaw decided. *I want to apologize to him and get answers from him about the prophecy. This is the perfect chance.* "And you?"

"I was . . . I mean, I wanted to check if their scents lead over the borders," he mewed unsteadily. "And I also planned on returning to MoonClan to report."

Why was Dewpaw always unsteady around his Clanmates? He was practically their top, most popular and respected apprentice. He wasn't always like this.

"Well I'm going to find their camp," Icepaw said, trotting ahead. "If you want to come with me, I will appreciate the help." He didn't think that huis brother wanted to come.

But it didn't take long for Dewpaw to catch up. "Wait! I'll come. I'll help save Squirrelkit and Silverkit."

Chapter Eighteen

Edited ✔

Icepaw could not help but tremble in the freezing cold of the snow. DarkClan had many trees, so he could not see at all if the sun had risen or not. Maybe this is why DarkClan had been called . . . *Dark*Clan? Maybe it was because they lived in the dark shade of endless trees? It reminded him of the Twilight Forest.

He shivered again, shrinking in his own fur. Dewpaw trotted ahead, not giving a care in the world as he sniffed the freezing air. "I can't scent them," he meowed. "Maybe we should go back to MoonClan. Cats will wake up soon."

Icepaw shook his head. "Let's just find their camp. They probably took Squirrelkit and Silverkit there. Where else could they establish a perfect place to keep them hostage?"

Dewpaw's head dropped. "*Icepaw*," he wined.

Icepaw shot him a look. "I am telling you: if you want to go back I will not stop you. But you will not stop *me* from going forward." His eyes narrowed. "You don't look up to it, Dewpaw."

"Because I'm not. I just have to make sure you're safe—I mean—um . . ." Dewpaw trailed off, searching for words. "I wanted to make sure you wouldn't get hurt?"

"Is that a question or a statement?" Icepaw asked awkwardly.

"Never mind, we need a plan," Dewpaw went on. "Let's think something up so when we get to the camp we can be ready." His paws shuffled. Fresh paw prints were made out in the snow. Icepaw realized that their tracks led all the way up here.

Oh please, let out tracks be covered! I don't want Brightstar to follow me or send a patrol here! Icepaw silently begged in his mind. *I don't want*

to deal with MoonClan now. I have enough problems in my head already.

They continued on.

As time passed by he realized that his tracks were being covered by the snow that descended to the ground. He felt a bit glad about it, but also nervous. Firstly, how would they find their way back? Secondly, the DarkClan tracks were disappearing! His eyes widened as he turned to Dewpaw.

"We have to hurry!"

"Why?" asked Dewpaw, startled.

Icepaw shook his head. "No time to explain! Let's go!" He began to run through the forests of DarkClan, his paws thudding softly on the snow that made him sink. The breeze became colder as he ran, causing his face to freeze. His chest burned and pounded the more he sprinted.

Dewpaw followed close behind, striding through the white DarkClan forests. Light shone through the trees. He wondered how close it was to dawn.

Suddenly, he caught a faint voice. He froze in his tracks, and Dewpaw stopped at his haunches, almost crashing into his rear. "Hey! What's the hold up, I thought we had to hurry?" Dewpaw asked, padding up to Icepaw's face.

"Shh," Icepaw scolded.

His hearing strained as far as they can go, and he heard the voices more clearer now. " . . . Are you sure you scented something?" came a voice of a she-cat.

"Well, duh! We stole MoonClan's kits, they're sure to come after us!" a tom responded.

"I hope they fall into the trap," another cat said.

"Shut up, they can be anywhere, Treepaw," the tom scolded. The

voices grew more silent at the tom's statement. Icepaw's eyes squinted through the dark forest, and he spotted the outline of a cat's ears through the tiny light filtering through the forest. They were close!

Dewpaw must of realized it, too. He was already heading off into another direction, going into the little undergrowth that DarkClan had. Icepaw followed his brother, shielding himself from the view of the DarkClan cats. As he padded on, a thought came to mind. *A trap?*

Did they plan on luring MoonClan over for a battle or something? Icepaw's heart raced, and he met Dewpaw's eyes. His brother nodded—Icepaw didn't understand why, though. His brother's tail flicked, beckoning him forward.

Slowly, Icepaw padded forward, more farther away from the patrol of DarkClan cats until they were out of each other's earshot. Dewpaw turned to Icepaw once more. "They mentioned something about a trap." His voice was low.

"I know," murmured Icepaw. "Why else would they take the kits?"

"To kill them for revenge?" Dewpaw suggested.

Icepaw shot him a glare, and Dewpaw shrugged. "Well, think this out logically," Icepaw set out. "They take two MoonClan kits. There are many things they may do with them, but we don't know what is going to happen. Perhaps they want battle in their own territory? I mean, they are stronger here. And plus, there's *lots* of them."

Dewpaw nodded. "I know."

"And," Icepaw went on, "It's leaf-bare. There is barely any prey, and you know they are stealing food from CloudClan even though they are denying it. They'd pick a fight with any cat, you know. Maybe they want food in return for Silverkit and Squirrelkit?"

"I understand, don't worry," Dewpaw said. "What I don't get is why they'd take *kits*."

"Kits are important and precious Clan members," Icepaw suggested.

"Well, anyways, we have to get them back. By all means. We also need to watch our paws for that trap."

That is what a strong-minded warrior would think, Shard praised him. *You're still weak at mind, Icepaw, but this is a start. Maybe you are not as stupid as I thought.*

Although Icepaw was certain it was his own subconscious, that statement in his mind said by Shard, the Twilight Warrior, made him recall their few encounters. When Shard tried to kill him when he was a kit; when he challenged Icepaw's true strength . . .

Maybe Shard was only a part of himself that wanted to grow stronger. But that remained a mystery to himself, as did the surreal dreams.

Dewpaw stepped up and snapped Icepaw out of thought. "We must devise a plan. And fast. Dawn is coming soon."

* * *

Icepaw and Dewpaw knew they were close to the camp now.

It had to be at least sunhigh, for the amount of time they were walking dumbfounded around the territory, hidden among the undergrowth and the cover of the trees. No cat had discovered their presence in their territory yet, thankfully, but Icepaw knew it was not long now that some mysteries of DarkClan will be vanquished and Silverkit and Squirrelkit would be saved.

Ripplefur, you'd better be watching us now. This is for you , Spottedkit and Skypelt.

Skypelt had been sick for a few days, still out of fresh grief, and also because of the cold weather even though very soon it was suppose to end. Now that his only two kits were gone, he was dreaded. It pained Icepaw very much. He wondered if the cats in his camp were searching for Icepaw and Dewpaw right now, if they were even awake? The search patrols must have returned. Brightstar must have realized by now that Icepaw had slipped out.

More importantly, when or if they saved the kits, would Flamepaw

be in camp, willing to talk to Icepaw even though the two fought during the first battle of MoonClan's, CloudClan's and DarkClan's war?

He sighed at the thought of it.

Dewpaw nudged him, pointing forward with his nose. His voice came out in a whisper. "Look." The apprentice's white coat blended in perfectly with the snow. That'd give him an advantage. Icepaw's coat was only a bit darker, more noticeable. If anyone should sneak around, it should be Dewpaw.

Icepaw looked forward and saw deep gray caverns covered in thick bramble thickets in the distance, doused over in snow that helped it blend in. It was there camp! And it was too well-built.

Four cats stood outside on guard, two at the entrance, and two others walking around the area. DarkClan must be very protective of their camp. He wondered what they were protecting, other than the hostages. Maybe the just doubled the guards in case they thought MoonClan would make it to their camp.

"How in StarClan's sake are we going to get through that?" Icepaw muttered, his voice extremely low for precautions.

Dewpaw studied the area for a moment. Then, he must have noticed something as his ears flicked up.

"What is it?" asked Icepaw.

Dewpaw pointed with his tail. "Look, if you see by an angle, the camp is on a hill. If given the perfect chance, that's one way to sneak in . . . oh, and look, too! Branches and trees hang just above the camp. That's the biggest flaw yet!"

"And how do you suppose we get in? The camp looks *huge*!" Icepaw said with awe, staring at the wide walls and the steep caves.

"Well, first, let's study this place and see where they never mended holes in the walls of the camp. If that doesn't work out, we find their dirtplace and we have to go through there," Dewpaw said, beginning to climb up the branches. "But only when we have the

right moment."

"Okay. But when do you think that will be?" Icepaw wondered out loud.

"At night," came a familiar voice. Icepaw instantly knew that it was Flamepaw—the nicest cat he had ever known in DarkClan—the cat he saved long ago from a falling branch, and likewise, the very cat who saved *him* from his own dark visions. The one who always seemed to be there for him in some way or another.

He turned and instantly met Flamepaw's amber eyes. "Greetings, Icepaw and Dewpaw."

Dewpaw bristled. "You!" he spat. "Don't come any closer!" His fur was spiked, teeth barred and his claws were unsheathed.

Icepaw was calm. He dipped his head. "I'm sorry, Flamepaw." The orange tom turned to Icepaw, surprised. "Listen," he went on. "I know that you weren't really my enemy the day I attacked you on the battle with CloudClan, but I was angry. I'm sorry I ever doubted you."

"Don't worry." He gave a warm smile. "I accept your apology. And as for Silverkit and Squirrelkit, steaming them was Sandstar's grand scheme to lure MoonClan out into a battle. I don't agree with it . . . I was just about to go find you. I thought that if I knew you well enough, you'd be coming right after them!"

"Wait," Dewpaw murmured. "You two know each other?"

Icepaw nodded. "Remember the first time DarkClan and MoonClan almost fought? Well, we were there. I saved Flamepaw and we became friends ever since."

"Oh," Dewpaw said. He still was bristling up, as if he did not trust the DarkClan apprentice. "Well, *Flamepaw,* how do we know you are our ally?"

"He is!" Icepaw pleaded. "He's one of my friends I trust the most."

Dewpaw snarled. "Yeah right."

Flamepaw looked uneasy around Dewpaw as well, as if meeting a new MoonClan warrior was like being face-to-face with a badger. *If these two keep this up, then we are never going to save the kits,* he realized. *I have to make them both know they can trust each other!*

"Flamepaw," Icepaw meowed, breaking the tension from his brother and the DarkClan apprentice. "You mentioned something about your Clan only leaving at night or something like that. Well . . . we need your help. MoonClan is sure to come sooner or later and we don't have until nightfall to stop this fight from happening."

Flamepaw nodded. "I am here to help."

"Then we need a plan," Dewpaw said. He leaned close to Icepaw and whispered, "I don't want to share any of our plans with this stranger. He could be betraying us right under our whiskers!"

Icepaw gave Dewpaw a long reassuring look and turned back to Flamepaw. "Well," he went on, "Are there any entrances you can sneak us in?"

Flamepaw shook his head. "The camp is tightly branched. But the two kits are in the prison den."

"*Prison*?" asked Dewpaw.

What does prison *even mean?* Icepaw asked, startled. He had never heard such a word in his lifetime.

"You don't have a prison den in your camp?" asked Flamepaw, surprised.

Both Dewpaw and Icepaw shook their heads. "We don't even know what that means," admit Icepaw. He turned to Dewpaw, who looked almost startled as if it were another word for murder.

"Strange . . ." murmured Flamepaw. "A prison den is where they keep intruders, or prisoners—as they call them."

"Oh," said Dewpaw. "Well, go on."

"Okay," Flamepaw meowed. "The prison den is under dirt, so I

suppose we could easily dig a hole down. It has to be narrow, though, because I don't want my Clanmates to notice. From there, we pull them out and take a swift way back to MoonClan because I am *sure* you had a hard time finding our camp."

"Definitely," agreed Icepaw. "I've never been more confused trying to find a camp in my life."

Flamepaw nodded. "I know. I will only have to show you because Sandstar thinks I went hunting."

Dewpaw snickered. Icepaw felt calmer now. At least his brother was starting to get more used to Flamepaw. Perhaps he was starting to even trust him?

"Anyways, start digging from here," Flamepaw ordered, pawing the ground at a certain spot.

"Why are you helping us anyway?" asked Dewpaw just as Icepaw began to dig.

"Cause I don't feel that DarkClan is doing something right. Stealing kits is cruel, and so is trying to break the warrior code, and kill other cats, and start unnecessary battles," he admitted with a small shrug of his shoulders. His words became quieter as he spoke.

"Quit chirping like birds and help me dig!" Icepaw growled. "I don't like getting my paws dirty like this." He was not looking forward to cleaning in between his paw pads later. But at least Brightstar would be pleased to have Silverkit and Squirrelkit back.

Soon, the three apprentices made out a small opening at the bottom. It was dark, but a shrill yet silent gasp came from inside. It was Silverkit! He dug deeper into it and poked his paw through, then opened up a big enough hole to fit his head inside.

"Silverkit?" he whispered. "Squirrelkit?"

"Right here!" a tiny voice whispered back. "Icepaw! You came!" Excitedly, she ran over and touched noses with him. "We were so scared that none of our Clanmates were gonna save us! Squirrelkit and I were planning to escape by ourselves."

Icepaw shook his head. "We're here now. Dewpaw came and a DarkClan apprentice helped."

"Flamepaw?" Silverkit asked.

"You know Flamepaw?" Icepaw asked with surprise.

"When Silverkit and I were hungry, Sandstar was being mean and she said her own Clan is hungry enough. She said she didn't care about us, so she'd rather let *us* starve," the kit said. "But then Flamepaw gave us a portion of his starling!"

Icepaw purred. "How nice of him. But anyway, where *is* Squirrelkit?" He was starting to get worried for a second, but then he saw Squirrelkit closer to the front of the den on his side, his chest rising and falling in a rhythmic sleep.

"Squirrelkit was forced to sleep," murmured Silverkit. "Some cat bashed him on the head." Her eyes looked pained. "They really meant to bash me but Squirrelkit jumped in front of me. There was a huge argument so I didn't end up getting hurt. Thank StarClan you're here, I don't know what they planned to do with me."

"Silverkit, we can't waste much more time talking. Bring him over here. We'll just have to carry him," Icepaw decided. "But hurry!"

Obediently, she dragged her brother to the back of the den. Icepaw was surprised to see Squirrelkit not even budge. He gripped the almost apprentice-sized kit by the scruff and pulled him out. Silverkit crawled after, her silver pelt dotted with dirt. It seemed that crawling through was easy for her, since she was so small.

Her eyes widened. "I'm outside camp again," she meowed breathlessly. "I can't wait to get back to Skypelt!"

Icepaw understood how she felt, with leaving camp for the first time and all. She also must want to see her father. He was as worried as he was on the day his kits were born. Times these days were dark and no cat was usually easy, including Skypelt and the rest of the Clan. *I wonder if times are dark because of the prophecy . . .*

"Dewpaw," said Icepaw, "Take Silverkit and start filling up the hole

again. Have her try to wake her brother up."

"Fine," muttered Dewpaw, pawing at the dirt.

"I'll help—" Flamepaw said, but Icepaw cut him off.

"Flamepaw, we need to talk," Icepaw murmured. "About the darkness."

"*The prophecy*," whispered Flamepaw. "What do you have to say about it?"

Icepaw shook his head. "Brightstar thinks I am part of it, because I am the one who recieved it in a dream," he meowed.

"You did?" asked Flamepaw. "But didn't I tell you about the prophecy?"

Icepaw shrugged. "I guess. But when I was under water, I got the first half. Then you told me the rest. Besides, I've always had strange dreams . . . I don't get it at all."

Flamepaw looked down to his paws. "I don't get it either," he admit. "But maybe Brightstar is right."

"Then maybe you are the other cat in the prophecy? There are two cats, one who is going to lead, and one who is going to destroy," Icepaw went on. It pained him to say it. *The cat who is going to destroy must be the enemy.*

"I am not part of the prophecy," Flamepaw meowed. "I don't feel as if I have a part to it. I am not even *supposed* to know it. In a dream, there was a cat named Shard talking to some StarClan cats about sending a MoonClan apprentice a prophecy. I wasn't suppose to overhear it, but I did."

"I know Shard," murmured Icepaw, unsheathing his claws.

"They said something about two MoonClan apprentices," admit Flamepaw.

Icepaw's heart skipped a beat. *Two MoonClan apprentices? There are*

five of us! Me, Dewpaw, Dawnpaw, Volepaw and Sweetpaw! he recalled. Dawnpaw and Volepaw were close to getting their warrior names—Sweetpaw was going to get her medicine name sooner or later. In a moon or two it would be Icepaw and Dewpaw's turn. But in reality, there seemed to be nothing wrong with Sweetpaw and Volepaw. Or Dawnpaw, even. Then it had to be either Dewpaw or someone else . . . Well, there seemed to be nothing wrong with *any* of them. *It's so hard trying to figure out who the second cat is!*

"Are you sure?" asked Icepaw.

"I'm positive," Flamepaw confirmed.

But just then, Silverkit raced aback to Icepaw's side. "Icepaw!" she shrieked with a wail of horror. "DarkClan—it's DarkClan! They realized we escaped!"

Chapter Nineteen

Edited ✔

Icepaw's fur was sticking up on end. He picked up Squirrelkit in his jaws, and Flamepaw began to lead the way, as fast as his paws could take him. Silverkit ran ahead of him, Dewpaw at her side, to make sure she didn't fall behind. *Why can't he help me? Squirrelkit is almost the size of an apprentice—he's heavy!* thought Icepaw with anger.

Dewpaw seemed to realize, and fell back a little, lifting up the other half of Squirrelkit's unconscious body. Icepaw nodded his thanks to him, and the two continued on, chasing after Flamepaw as he headed closer and closer to MoonClan. It felt like Dewpaw's and Icepaw's continuous searching and scouting all around DarkClan earlier had been stupid.

There was this easy path the whole time and they didn't know about it! But suddenly, a shrill shriek yowled up ahead, and Silverkit tripped down into a hole. Icepaw gasped, releasing Squirrelkit to Dewpaw.

"Go on, I'll catch up!" yowled Icepaw, leaping after the silver she-kit.

Silverkit clung hard onto a branch, and Icepaw realized that the hole was deep. His eyes widened, and he reached for her with his jaws, grabbing on to her scruff. Thankfully, she was lighter than her brother. But lifting her up would still be no easier than carrying Squirrelkit.

"C'mon, help me! Haul yourself up, Squirrelkit," encouraged Icepaw.

"I'm *Silverkit*!" she squeaked back, the anger clearly heard in her tone.

Icepaw almost felt embarrassed for a second, and mumbled, "Sorry,"

at the same time she skidded her claws onto the branch. With the effort the two put into it, they finally made it. Silverkit was panting hard, and Icepaw could practically feel her little heart beating two times it's normal rate.

"That was close—" Silverkit began.

"Hush," Icepaw cut off. He could make out pawsteps with his ears. The enemy was close. He pushed Silverkit deeper under ground, hiding her radiant pelt from beaming in the light so she would not give them away. She opened her mouth once more, but Icepaw rest his tail over it before she let out another word. Silverkit talked too much! Why couldn't she once keep her mouth shut?

She must of realized that DarkClan was near, and she shrunk back into the underground darkness, hiding behind a small tangle of roots that came from the top of the hole.

"Are you sure they went this way?" a familiar voice hissed. It was Sandstar! He hadn't seen that old crazy she-cat leader for almost two moons!

"Yes, I am sure of it. It is mixed with Flamepaw's scent as well . . ." another she-cat murmured.

"Flashpelt, I hope you are right," growled what it sounded like Toadpaw. "Flamepaw better not be betraying us. Last fight with MoonClan, he was reluctant to attack."

"My son wouldn't betray us!" spat Sandstar. A loud thud sounded. Icepaw guessed that Sandstar had tackled the smaller and weaker apprentice down. Toadpaw grunted with surprise, and Sandstar hissed once more. "Take that back! He was only thinking about our Clan! You know he doesn't want us to fight at times like this! He is thinking merely about our strength!"

"I-I'm sorry, Sandstar," murmured Toadpaw. "I did not mean to bad-mouth Flamepaw like that. I didn't realize it—"

"Oh, save it!" growled Flashpelt.

Sandstar hissed to Flashpelt. "You, be quiet! This has nothing to do

with you!"

"Y-yes, Sandstar," murmured Flashpelt.

Icepaw's heart kept racing. *Sandstar is Flamepaw's mother!* he thought with a shrill of fear. *But those two are so different. And I thought kits weren't supposed to be mentored by their parents!*

"Hey, I found something," gasped one more voice—a tom cat Icepaw couldn't recognize. "They are very, very close . . . I smell that annoying, talkative piece of fox-dung, Silverkit."

Silverkit flinched, clearly offended, but Icepaw shook his head, indicating it was not true.

"Find her right now or I will rip your heart out while it still beats!" Sandstar ordered once more.

Silverkit tensed beside him, and Icepaw shoved her deeper into the roots, following her within the shelter himself.

Sandstar had driven her Clan to fear, Icepaw realized. *They all always seem to be trying to please their leader. No wonder they are all harsh to the other Clans. No wonder they do not know the real warrior code. It's as if DarkClan is a Clan of rogues!*

"Flashpelt, Toadpaw, look around this area," Sandstar meowed, her voice harsh. "I will go back around camp with Tigerfang to see if the two MoonClan crow-food did not stray that far."

"Yes, Sandstar," the two almost said at the same time. Sandstar began padding away with Tigerfang. They were so obedient! Did Sandstar not listen to her Clan's suggestions? He shifted uncomfortably closer to Silverkit, scared that Flashpelt and Toadpaw would discover their hiding spot.

The pawsteps were awfully close. "I swear I could've scented something disgusting around here . . ." muttered Toadpaw, while at the same time Flashpelt grunted of agreement.

"Hey, Flashpelt! Toadpaw!" called another cat. He easily made out that the voice was Flamepaw's. Then that means that Dewpaw and

Squirrelkit safely got back over the MoonClan border. "Erm, guys, I think I scented Silverkit and Squirrelkit that way. Let's go, I even saw flashes of their pelts!"

"Huh?" asked Toadpaw. "Are you sure?"

"Are you defying me?" asked Flamepaw, his voice almost as tough as Sandstar's. It was almost unrecognizable.

"I'd never defy you!" insisted Toadpaw.

"Lead the way, Flamepaw, we're following you," meowed Flashpelt obediently.

"Let's go," Flamepaw said sharply, his paw steps thudding away to someplace else. The two other cats followed him, until they were not heard anymore.

Icepaw's racing heart was cooling down. They were gone! He made sure once more by straining his hearing beyond the hole, and nothing could be heard. He sighed of relief, and led Silverkit out, giving her a boost from his shoulders.

Silverkit was trembling. She almost ripped back down, but caught herself immediately and ran away from it, behind Icepaw. "That was close!" she meowed, still trembling.

"Yes, I know," meowed Icepaw curtly. "Next time you should be more careful. And next time keep your mouth shut too!" He felt his scolding was too harsh, but he can't take it back. Silverkit had to learn.

"I'm sorry, Icepaw," she meowed, her ears dropping back. "But . . . Flamepaw is gone, he cannot lead us back home. And Dewpaw and Squirrelkit are gone too. We are lost. What are we gonna do?" She looked back and forth. "I can't even remember which way their camp was and where our territory is!"

Icepaw opened his jaws, scenting the air. He could smell something. It was Dewpaw's and Squirrelkit's and Flamepaw's fresh yet faint scents, leading away. They had left a trail!

"Follow me, Silverkit, and for StarClan's sake, do not stray away or open your mouth!" Icepaw meowed, beginning to follow Flamepaw's careful scent trail.

"Yes Icepaw," she murmured, her voice low.

* * *

Soon, the borders of MoonClan were made out. After a long walk, he had made it! As soon as he reached the border, he also had run into Skypelt, Brightstar, Volepaw, Adderclaw, and Sparrowheart. Behind them all, Dewpaw stood. He waited for him!

Eagerly, Silverkit left Icepaw's side and ran straight for her father. "Skypelt!" she called, her voice shaky. She crashed into his white pelt, and nuzzled him. "Skypelt, I thought I'd be gone forever! I thought I'd lose you too!"

Skypelt soothed his daughter. "Don't worry little one," he murmured, his voice smooth. "You're here now, thanks to Dewpaw and Icepaw."

"Where's Squirrelkit?" she asked.

"Your brother woke up, and was escorted back to camp with Sweetpaw. He didn't seem to be in good condition, he seemed sick," meowed Skypelt. "But don't worry. We are going to go back to MoonClan right now!"

Icepaw smiled at the reunited family.

But suddenly, a piercing pain stabbed into his spine. "You're not going anywhere!" hissed Sandstar, dragging Icepaw back into the darkness of her Clan.

Icepaw struggled and flailed. "Let me go!" he yowled, managing to flip himself over and kick her off. She was strong and heavy. What now? Another battle with DarkClan?

Sandstar hissed angrily, and her claws released. Behind her, trailed her Clanmates, coming one after another to the clearing. Their angry eyes sparked and blazed, their claws were unsheathed, and

they looked ready to battle. MoonClan was outnumbered . . . *Great StarClan! Help!* Icepaw thought.

A/N: Yay, two chapters in one day :D Sorry it is shorter than usual. But, YAY~ ANOTHER CLIFF-HANGER! XD Thanks for those who have kept updated with my story and those who have decided to comment and stuff ;w;

It means a lot

Well, anyways, I've decided to give those people dedications sooner or later cuz they're so nice >:) And thx for almost 200 votes and almost 60 comments and almost 4k reads :D IT MEANS EVERYTHING!

keep updated
~l.tc

Chapter Twenty

Edited ✔

Icepaw's fur was on end as he turned around to face Sandstar along with an entire patrol of cats behind her. Flamepaw stood along with them, but anger blazed in his eyes. He pushed passed his Clan members, standing up to his leader besides Icepaw, a growl deep in his throat.

"You did not tell me that you were going to attack MoonClan!" he yowled, his fur bristling up with anger. "I thought I was your apprentice!"

"You are better yet my son," she hissed. "Today, we will *defeat* MoonClan." Her evil eyes looked up to Brightstar, and Icepaw's leader stood angrily with her teeth barred.

"Never!" she growled, loud enough for everyone to hear.

Flamepaw stood between the two Clans. MoonClan was yet again outnumbered like the last time. Icepaw felt small as he remembered Featherbreeze once more. But this time, he did not let his emotion and aggression get the better of him. He felt her looking proudly down at him.

You've heeded my advice, my son, she said to him.

It was as if a whole burden had been released off his shoulders, and he felt like he was floating for a moment, until he finally realized that he was still on the DarkClan borders, close to MoonClan. Close to battle.

StarClan is watching over you and your Clan, Featherbreeze whispered into his mind. *Remember, the darkness was never meant to be, and two cats high and proud will lead and destroy.*

Icepaw inhaled. That prophecy again. But somehow, he knew it was

going to help him during the battle between MoonClan and DarkClan.

Sandstar took a step forward, crouching down so that she was face-to-face with her son, Flamepaw. "Oh? So are you defying my rule?" she asked, her voice surprisingly calm. "Won't you accept today's battle, O wise one?"

Icepaw looked fearfully at Flamepaw—the cat who helped save him and his friends. What if he suddenly betrayed him? Icepaw's heart thumped as he forced his neck fur to stay flat.

Flamepaw took a deep breath, and finally, from what seemed like forever, he nodded curtly. "I'm defying you," he hissed, unsheathing his claws. "DarkClan has been living lies for a long time. I won't put up with it!"

"Fine then!" Sandstar yowled, slashing his cheek with her foreclaws with no hesitation. "You're no ally of mine!"

"No!" Icepaw yelped, immediately rushing up to Flamepaw.

Angrily, the rusty-orange apprentice stood up again, his deep growl still present in the back of his throat. "Keep going!" he challenged, standing tall and proud.

Sandstar hissed again and slashed his chin this time, but now, Flamepaw landed his own attack on her, slashing hard on her neck. "I thought you said I was your son!"

"You *were*," Sandstar growled. Icepaw could tell that Sandstar was trying not to wince in pain after the blow. "I don't need you in my Clan. Go somewhere else for all I care!"

Brightstar stood taller. "Icepaw, come here," she ordered. "I am not going to waste my time today fighting. There will be no more bloodshed!"

Sandstar looked up angrily. "When Icepaw killed Fallentail, that meant war," she said angrily. "You left our dead warrior between the borders as a sign of war a long time ago! And now, that war you wanted is going to start! DarkClan, attack!"

Brightstar's fur bristled intensely. "Icepaw, Flamepaw, get over here!" she ordered. "Get Silverkit to camp and order help from as many warriors as you can get!"

"No, I am going to stay and fight," growled Flamepaw.

"I will take Silverkit back," Skypelt said. "I need to ensure the safety of my kits. I promise to bring cats back with me. Please, Brightstar!"

Brightstar nodded. "Go now, Skypelt!" Her meow was anxious. Then, before DarkClan could even reach MoonClan's borders, she raised her voice out and yowled, "MoonClan, attack!"

Icepaw felt his paws naturally flee from his spot as he charged over to the borders. He let out a battle cry, an angry one, and leaped at the nearest warrior.

"Mangy MoonClan apprentice!" she hissed, throwing him off her back.

Icepaw gasped and landed with a loud thud, quickly recovering to his paws although his head spun. He recognized the she-cat warrior's voice. It was Flashpelt, the one who was on the search for the two escaped kits, had-mouthing Silverkit with the worst words she could possibly think of.

She will pay for what she has done!

Icepaw leaped at Flashpelt, biting down hard at her ear while at the same moment, Flashpelt tumbled right onto her side, taken aback by Icepaw's surprising move. But then, her forepaws locked onto his shoulders, her claws digging in deep, and her back paws began to dig painfully in Icepaw's stomach with each claw stretched out as far as they possibly could go.

He let out an agonizing yowl and released her ear as she triumphantly let him go. Before he could recover from this brief moment, she shot back right on him with her teeth fastened onto his neck. Icepaw struggled hard, flailing all of his legs like crazy. His body wormed underneath her and he slipped his back paws under her soft underbelly, managing to kick her off. He panted

heavily from the strong efforts.

Was this how real DarkClan warriors fought? Like merciless rogues?

Yes, thought Icepaw, recalling each and every one of their brutal battles. This meant he had to sink to their level to beat her! He yowled with rage, leaping onto her back before she realized it.

Angrily, Flashpelt pushed off the ground and leaped high into the air, flipping over, indicating that she'd land on her back. But before it happened, Icepaw released and pushed off of her, remembering his intense training that day with the mentors and apprentices.

This was the move that they learned that day!

All of Ashtail's teachings were back instantly, along with Brightstar's intense training. Flashpelt landed hard on her back, the wind knocking out of her body. She coughed up a little blood, staggering to her paws before Icepaw could react.

"Haven't you had enough?" hissed Icepaw. He did not want to admit it, but he felt dangerously exhausted. From not having a decent sleep to the rescue mission that required long travel and hard effort, the only thing allowing him to fight this battle was the adrenaline and the intense desire to protect his Clan at all costs.

"I haven't," she responded with menace, catching her breath. "I will fight you to the death. Better hope StarClan has room for more!"

Faster than a squirrel, she swiped at his chest before he could react. Icepaw instantly staggered back, coughing up blood from the deep cut she had given him. Flashpelt charged again, but before she could reach him, Flamepaw took Icepaw's place and leaped at his Clanmate.

Icepaw stared in horror as Flamepaw easily dug his claws into her chest and scruff, holding her down, while his jaws met her neck and bit down hard. Where had he learned such killing moves? His tail was even tucked in, as if he were the only cat in the forest who knew how to balance without it.

Flashpelt landed dead on the floor, her eyes wide open.

With pained amber eyes, Flamepaw looked up at Icepaw. "This battle has to end . . ." he murmured. "No cat should be fighting!"

"I know," agreed Icepaw almost silently. But as soon as he said that, a yowl of agony ripped through the forest. Brightstar landed onto the ground, right before Icepaw, her eyes shutting slowly.

Sandstar triumphantly stood over her.

Oh no! Icepaw thought. *Was this her last life?*

Sandstar growled. "Brightstar is such a weak cat. I wonder how many more lives she has? I'd be pleased to rip the remaining ones away from her all at once!"

"Never!" growled Icepaw angrily. "I will *never* allow that!" He stood protectively by his leader.

"Oh, you?" asked Sandstar with a mocking voice. "How can you stop me?"

Icepaw's legs were trembling with grief and anger. But before anything could happen, Brightstar gasped and her eyes shuttered open once more, and she looked up at Sandstar with harsh eyes.

"Get—get off my territory!" Icepaw's leader stammered, catching wind of her new life. "Or today will be your last!"

Sandstar looked thrilled. "Oh really?" she mewed. "How?" Her eyes blazed with excitement and evil ambition.

Those are the eyes of a murderer, Icepaw thought angrily. How did Flamepaw ever put up with her?

A familiar apprentice emerged from behind Sandstar. "Look!" he wailed.

Icepaw's eyes widened as he recalled who this was. *Beetlepaw? That kit I'd fought?* Icepaw thought with fear and amazement. Beetlepaw grown—matured, even. He had sleek muscles and of course, he was much bigger, now at the regular apprentice age.

But, before Beetlepaw had said anything more, Icepaw swiftly turned to what Beetlepaw was staring at, and his eyes widened. There, right before him, stood most MoonClan. Now DarkClan was the one outnumbered! He stared in amazement as the battle ripped apart.

A few DarkClan cats poured over their borders, dragging Flashpelt's body along with them. As the battle clearing became easier to see, no cat from MoonClan had evidently fallen.

Whiteleap, Sandstar's deputy, stood up, clearly fear stricken. "Sandstar! We must retreat!"

"No!" Sandstar yowled. "We are winning this battle!"

"But we can't loose it!" protested Whiteleap. "We are outnumbered!"

Sandstar stared at the large group. Brightstar boldly stood in front of Sandstar. "Leave," she ordered, "or my Clan will come striking down upon yours like a fierce wildfire!"

Sandstar growled with frustration, her eyes glimmering in thought. "DarkClan, retreat!" she called angrily. The remaining cats who fought broke apart, looking up with shock. Sandstar herself seemed livid. "Know this, *Brightstar*, I am going to cause you and your Clan pain! I will no longer show mercy like I did today!" Then, she turned to her Clan and yowled: "Retreat!"

Icepaw watched as they disappeared into their territory. Flamepaw watched them go with grief and anger in his eyes. The last cat they saw was Sandstar, who gave one last dirty glance to MoonClan before chasing after her party.

No Clan had won that day. But thankfully, Icepaw and his friends successfully escaped bloodshed.

* * *

Brightstar looked down to her Clan from the Moonrock, her eyes blazing. "Icepaw," she meowed, "Dewpaw, Flamepaw, please come here."

Icepaw gulped and climbed up after his leader. "Are we in trouble?" he asked, scared that Brightstar would punish him and his brother for sneaking out of camp.

Brightstar shook her head. "No, my apprentice," she said with a warm smile. Her white pelt was bloodstained. Her legs visibly trembled with weakness as she kept herself standing. Brightstar leaned in close to Icepaw's ear when he got close enough. "I have lost my fifth life today."

Icepaw's eyes widened with fear. "What will happen when the last life is gone?"

"My deputy will become leader, obviously," Brightstar purred. Was she not troubled? "Well, all cats old enough to catch their own prey, please gather here."

Every cat gathered into the clearing, even the kits though they could not catch prey like the older Clan cats. Brightstar straightened her stance and stood prouder. "Today," she announced, "Three brave apprentices put their lives at risk to save our dear kits from harm, and those same three apprentices have also bravely risked their lives to save MoonClan in battle. I have seen something especially astonishing, and have an important announcement to make."

Icepaw's eyes widened, and he looked at his leader.

She raised her voice and began: "I, Brightstar, leader of MoonClan, call upon to look down on these three apprentices. Icepaw, Dewpaw and Flamepaw had trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to be a warrior in their turns."

Icepaw looked astonished as Brightstar spoke. Was this really happening? It was! Brightstar was making him a warrior! For once in his entire apprenticeship, Icepaw had seemed to forget about the prophecy of darkness as Brightstar continued to speak.

"First, Icepaw," she meowed. "Do you promise to uphold the code and protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your own life?"

Icepaw knew these words clearly. "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name! You shall now be called Icetail, in honor of your previous mentor, Ashtail. I also give you your warrior name in recognition of your courage, your loyalty, and your fierce desire to protect all your Clanmates. Never forget that Featherbreeze will live forever in your heart. MoonClan welcomes you as a full warrior!"

Icetail's heart almost skipped three beats, but it almost stopped when he did not hear his Clanmates call out his name. Slowly, however, Sparrowheart began to chant his newly given name. In a matter of seconds, the whole Clan joined along. He felt proud and happy and could burst of joy! If only Featherbreeze were here.

Oh, but I am *watching you!* Featherbreeze said. *I'm so proud of you! I knew you'd become a warrior, Icetail.* Her voice in his head felt comforting.

Now, it was Dewpaw's turn. The same ceremony that Icetail received happened to him, and he was named Dewfang, for his ferocious fighting spirit and his amazing strength and quick thinking. Of course, his mentor approved his training to be done, and when the chanting had died down, Flamepaw nervously stood up.

"Now, Flamepaw," Brightstar meowed, landing her soft gaze on the apprentice. He seemed to shrink back. "Today, you've done everything you could for my Clan. You've risked your life to defend it in battle, *and* it's kits . . . Ripplefur, if she were here, would thank you. Skypelt thanks you enough."

"And that I do," Skypelt agreed.

"No," Flamepaw murmured. "I did what was right. I've been with the enemy Clan before, and you can't name me a warrior unless I am part of MoonClan."

"Then join us," said Brightstar simply, "or be Clanless. My generous offer will not wait. I am ready to name you a warrior when you are. You deserve it, Flamepaw."

Flamepaw dipped his head. "Thank you, Brightstar," he whispered with what seemed like his whole heart. Then, with a louder voice he said, "I will accept your generous offer and join this Clan. I'll be a MoonClan warrior and serve you and our Clanmates wholeheartedly."

"Good." Brightstar purred. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I, Brightstar, leader of MoonClan, give you your warrior name! You will be now known as Flameheart. Your heart is big, and your mind knows what is right, Flameheart. The name suits you perfectly. You've come from our enemy Clan, but you proved yourself worthy today of your dedication to serve your friends here. MoonClan accepts you as a full warrior to our Clan." She dipped her head to him.

"Thank you for the name," Flameheart murmured. "It's nice."

"Flameheart! Flameheart!" called the Clan, though a few specific cats did not chant. Obviously, it was Sharpfang and his little gang of cats. But Flameheart did not care. He looked happily down to his new Clan.

Brightstar sighed, and leaned in close to Icetail once more. "Had I done the right thing?" she asked him. "Letting Flameheart join the Clan, I mean?" Her voice was low so nobody else could hear it.

"Yes, I would have done the same thing. I trust him with all my heart," he meowed. "Flameheart is a good cat, Brightstar. Times have been hard, and now that the war began . . . we need all the help we could get, don't you think?"

"I hope you are right, Icetail," murmured Brightstar. "I really do."

A/N

OMG THE THIRD CHAPTER IN ONE DAY! I did not think I'd make it THIS FAR since I'm a painfully slow typer (even though I type really fast. I just run out of ideas a lot) with lots on my schedule! But, actually, this is NOT the last chapter. There are much, much more to come :P Even though it seems like an ending . . .

But YAY! They're finally warriors :D and now he officially has Flameheart on the good side!!

Hmm . . . but now . . . wait until I post more ^~^ I am done for today — typed WAY too much !

luv you

~l.tc

Allegiances - PART TWO

MoonClan

Leader: Brightstar - white she-cat with gray stripes and blue eyes

Deputy: Sparrowheart - plump gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Medicine Cat: Vinetail - large brown tom with amber eyes (apprentice: Sweetpaw)

Warriors:

Sharpfang - gray tom with blue eyes

Stonetooth - brown tabby tom with light green eyes

Softpelt - white she-cat with brown eyes

Adderclaw - brown tom with large white paws and green eyes

Ashtail - ginger tom with green eyes

Crowflight - black tom-cat with white tail tip, white ears and amber eyes

Swiftbreeze - gray she-cat with green eyes

Rosepetal - gray tabby she-cat with a sleek pelt and blue eyes

Fireshade - orange tom with green eyes and a white tail tip

Shadowheart - black tom with amber eyes

Skypelt - big white tom with brown eyes

Bluewing - dark gray she-cat with blue eyes (apprentice: Squirrelpaw)

Sagepelt - golden she-cat with brilliant green eyes

Petalwing - Small cream she-cat with a fluffy tail and blue eyes

Sedgetooth - ginger tom with a white chest, white paws and green eyes

Rainwhisker - dark gray tom with white paws and amber eyes

Grayfur - pale gray and white she-cat with brown eyes (apprentice: Silverpaw)

Mousetail - brown tom with hazel eyes

Volefur - large white tom with brown eyes

Dawnstripe - light orange she-cat with brown eyes

Flameheart - rusty orange tom with amber eyes

Icetail - gray tom with white paws, white under-belly, a torn ear, many battle scars and amber eyes

Dewfang - white tom with blue eyes

Apprentices:

Sweetpaw - cream colored she-cat with brown eyes, medicine cat apprentice

Silverpaw - silver she-cat with blue eyes

Squirrelpaw - gray tom cat

Queens:

Nightrose - black she-cat with white paws, white tail tip and ears (kits: Amberkit - ginger she-kit, Goldenkit - golden and white she-kit, Blackkit - black tom kit. Father is Fireshade)

Elders:

Thrushclaw- old brown tabby tom with light brown eyes

Stripeeyes- almost blind gray tabby tom

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DarkClan

Leader: Sandstar - light ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Deputy: Whiteleap - white tom with black paws, black tail tip, and piercing blue eyes

Medicine Cat: Hazelleaf - tawny she-cat with white underbelly and hazel eyes

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CloudClan

Leader: Swiftstar - large black and white tom cat with green eyes

Deputy: Echoleaf - muscular brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Medicine Cat: Violettooth - dark ginger she-cat with green eyes (apprentice: Splashface)

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StreamClan

Leader: Lakestar - gray tom cat with light blue eyes and a torn ear

Deputy: Moleheart - dark gray tabby tom with green eyes (apprentice: Ferretpaw)

Medicine Cat: Daisyleap - white she-cat with green eyes

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MarshClan

Leader: Stonestar - gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Deputy: Berryheart - white tom cat with ginger splotches

Medicine Cat: Pineheart - brown tabby tom with green eyes

(apprentice: Gorsepaw)

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OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Loners:

Bells - tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes
Red - ginger she-cat with green eyes
Hawk - gray tom with black paws and stripes
Gold - white she-cat with golde yellow eyes
Moon - orange she-cat with blue eyes
Thorn - gray tom

Chapter Twenty One

Edited ✔

It's been moons since the last outbreak of DarkClan and MoonClan.

Icetail sighed, sitting as the night guard right outside their camp. His eyes were wide open as he listened intently on the forest he'd come to love in his long moons. His paws shuffled uncomfortably as he sat guard. Volefur sat on the other side, his tail flicking impaitently as they waited for the sun to rise.

Icetail noticed his Clanmate's head beginning to drop of exhaustion. "Volefur!" he whisper-called. "Are you okay, Volefur?"

Volefur drowsily looked up. "Yes . . . yes, I'm fine, Icetail." He gave a long, silent yawn. "I'm just tired. It's nothing."

"Just don't fall asleep," Icetail warned. Volefur rolled his eyes and returned his gaze out in the forest, but his head began to drop again. "Volefur!"

Volefur's head bobbed up. "What!"

"Don't fall asleep," Icetail reminded him. "Hey, why don't you walk around camp? We might be here for a little longer. And if you fall asleep, Brightstar won't be pleased."

Volefur gave a long sigh. "Alright, I will," he meowed, getting up from his position. He began to pad away, and disappeared at the end of the bramble thickets. But a few moments later, he did not return.

Is that lazy furball sleeping again? Icetail thought with annoyance. A few more moments, Volefur returned, with his jaws wide open in yet another yawn. Icetail sighed and returned his gaze back to the forest as Volefur gave another lap around the camp.

A cat emerged from the camp entrance. "Icetail," greeted

Sparrowheart. "Your turn is over. Hey, where is Volefur?" He looked around.

"Volefur was sleepy so he began to walk around," informed Icetail.

Sparrowheart nodded. "Ah, how wise of him." He gave a little chuckle. "I see your bursting with energy, though, Icetail."

Icetail shrugged. "I had to stay in camp all day yesterday because Vinetail said so. Got a few thorns stuck in my paw. Rest was good for me." He gave a long sigh. "Sweetpaw said I was fine but Vinetail is such a cautious cat."

"Yeah," agreed Sparrowheart. "Hey, why don't you lead the night patrol? You seem rather lively and dynamic."

"Sure, Sparrowheart," mewed Icetail to his father.

Volefur emerged from the other end of the thickets once more. "I don't have to go on this patrol or anything, right?" he asked with yet another yawn.

"No, you can sleep. You had a long night," Sparrowheart said kindly. "Icetail, why don't you go ahead and choose who you want to take with you?" He motioned inside camp. "Dawnstripe and Dewfang have the next shift. Brightstar wants all the young cats on watch tonight, I suppose."

"Okay." Icetail got up from his spot, and stretched his legs. "Where is the patrol headed to?"

"Up near MarshClan." Sparrowheart then turned to Volefur. "Go on ahead to sleep."

Volefur gratefully nodded. "Thank you!" he meowed, padding into camp. Icetail followed after him, and Sparrowheart was the last to enter back into the camp. They were immediately greeted by Dawnstripe and Dewfang, but Volefur didn't bother saying hi back and headed straight for the warriors den. Icetail followed. Every cat was asleep, their chests gently rising and falling, rising and falling.

He noticed Rainwhisker stir in his nest and padded over, nudging

the young tom with his nose. "Hey, Rainwhisker," Icetail said in a low voice.

Rainwhisker stirred again, and his amber eyes opened up. "Hmm?"

"Want to go on the MarshClan night patrol?" he asked.

Rainwhisker nodded and got up from his nest. "Is this one of Brightstar's *extended* border patrols?" he asked. Icetail nodded. "Sure then, I'll go."

"Great," Icetail meowed.

"Can I come?" asked Flameheart, getting up from his nest. He shook the moss and feathers from his pelt. "I've never been on one of those."

Rainwhisker laughed softly. "There's nothing fun about it. It's just patrolling normally at night time," he said. "And it's awfully hard since it's dark—"

Angrily, one cat stirred in his nest. "Will you three shush up?" muttered Sharpfang, cutting off Rainwhisker. "Some of us are *trying* to get some sleep around here." His gray fur glinted in the moonlight as he stirred.

"Sorry, Sharpfang," apologized Icetail, "but some of us have more important things to do than sleeping."

Sharpfang gave a long sigh and said nothing more. His eyes closed again, and his breathing immediately became slow once more, indicating that he was sleeping. Petalfur, who shared a nest beside him, stood up.

"I'll go," she offered. "Yesterday all I did was help Grayfur and Silverpaw collect moss. I'm bursting with energy!" Her voice was low and she looked excited.

"I don't mind," Icetail said. "I need one more cat, though."

Ashtail nosed him. "How about me?" asked the ginger tom. "Brightstar or Sparrowheart don't let me go out as often as I did,

even though my wounds have mostly healed." Icetail realized that Ashtail was right. The older warrior wasn't as active as he used to be despite claiming to feel better. Although his wounds were inflicted many, many moons ago during Icetail's first fight with DarkClan as a new apprentice, deep scars still remained. It was evident that Ashtail would never be the same again.

Icetail nodded to Ashtail. "Yes, you may come. That's all I need. Now let's go before we get any one else's whiskers in a twist."

He noticed Sharpfang's ear twitch with annoyance and Shadowheart's tail flick, but he left before any of them said anything. Icetail still did not talk much to Shadowheart, but they shared only a few words when it became important. Even though Icetail convinced himself that he was over his mother's death, he also convinced himself that he was still not going to be too friendly Shadowheart any time soon.

He left the warriors den with his small patrol of four following close behind him. He immediately spotted Silverpaw as he left.

"Hey, Icetail!" she mewed eagerly, with her voice low. "Can I go on your patrol?"

Flameheart padded up from behind Icetail. "Sorry, Silverpaw," he said. "Night patrols are meant for warriors. Rules given by Sparrowheart himself."

Silverpaw nodded sadly. "Okay . . ." she murmured, and she padded off to the apprentice den, where Squirrelpaw was waiting wide awake.

Ever since they became apprentices, they'd been trying to go on *every* patrol, but now, Sparrowheart announced to limit the apprentice's patrol-times, especially at night, because he thought they were too eager in these dangerous times. Icetail felt that was a little mean, but of course, he did not defy his own father and deputy.

He padded out of the camp entrance, nodding politely to Dewfang and Dawnstripe before he left for the patrol. Flameheart trotted up

beside Icetail with his tail low to the ground. Behind him, Ashtail, Rainwhisker and Petalfur followed silently through MoonClan's dimly-lit forests.

The moon glinted in Icetail's eyes, but it didn't hurt him. A long time ago, his eyes had already developed properly, so now he got to carry along MoonClan's special abilities of strong-sighted eyes.

"I see you've already gotten use to that," Ashtail mentioned with a purr.

Icetail nodded. "Yeah. It's uncomfortable, but I'll be used to it in enough time."

"Yep, but that's what makes MoonClan special," said Petalfur.

Rainwhisker nodded of agreement. "I remember getting accustomed to it too," he said. "Anyways, we aren't here to talk about stuff like that. That's a mentor's job to an apprentice. Let's go have a nice patrol, 'kay?"

"Sure," Icetail said.

He was careful not to step on any twigs or leaves to make any sounds. New-leaf was now in the forests once more, and the prey had started to come back already last moon. Green shoots were faintly noticable even though it was still dark, and Icetail's senses were heightened that night.

Ashtail gave his former apprentice a small nudge with his shoulder. "Okay, patrol leader, what now?" he asked.

Icetail ducked his head in embarrassment. "Really, Ashtail?" he mewed.

Flameheart padded up beside him and pointed to a faint outline of a few fallen twigs in the distance. "Look," he said. "One of us is surely going to get out paws stuck onto that. Want me to move it?"

Icetail thought for a moment, and nodded. "Yeah. Both you and Petalfur should clear the area. Looks like the rain did this." The cool air smelled faintly of fresh dew and rain that fell upon the Clans. He

liked new-leaf because of the prey that submerged from the cold weather, but be hated the rain showers that the new season had to offer. Icetail disliked getting his paws wet.

"I'm on it," Petalfur meowed. "If only these dumb twigs were more sturdy on the trees." She sighed and began to tug away the soft bark with her teeth. Flameheart padded up to help.

Icetail then turned to the rest of the patrol. "MarshClan is just up ahead. Maybe we could scout the area before strengthening the borders," he decided. "The rain must've washed away a lot of our scents."

"I suppose so," said Rainwhisker as he made his way over to the territory borders. With his jaws opened, he sniffed at their side of the border before nodding his head in agreement. "You're right, Icetail!"

Ashtail padded over. "Then let's start," he said, "before some MarshClan patrol comes up. Or at least before dawn cracks."

Icetail nodded with approval and began to work his way marking the territory. A few moments later, Flameheart and Petalfur re-emerged into the clearing. "We cleared up the sticks," Petalfur explained. "But Flameheart got a bramble thorn stuck in his paw."

Flameheart lifted his paw to show Icetail. "It's fine," he said. "I already got out the thorn."

Icetail nodded. "But there's some blood trickling down," he pointed out. "Do you want to go back to camp to get it checked? Open wounds can lead to infections. We don't want another outbreak."

Flameheart shook his head and licked the blood off. "I'm fine. The sympathy the medicine cats gave me for a *thorn* the last time it happened was a bit aggravating." He sighed. "I won't mean to be a burden."

Icetail couldn't help but purr in amusement. "You're right. They do give lots of sympathy." He began to mark the MoonClan borders that ran along MarshClan once more. "Anyways, if your paw is

okay, help me with this. We don't want any MarshClan trespassers. DarkClan is too much of a pain already."

"Yeah," murmured Flameheart glumly, beginning to help Icetail.

Oh no! thought Icetail. *Maybe it was wrong that I mentioned his old Clan. Well, Flameheart's loyalty belongs to MoonClan now. Maybe there might be a battle between us the next time . . . and Flameheart will have to be involved. He has to get use to being a MoonClan warrior.* He remembered when he told Flameheart about the full warrior code when they'd just became warriors. Flameheart seemed pleased! Perhaps he didn't miss DarkClan as much as Icetail feared.

Petalfur ran up beside Icetail and dropped a limp creature from her jaws. "Look!" she exclaimed.

"Good job," praised Ashtail from the distance. "We need all the food we can get to recover from leaf-bare. But let's get back to marking the borders. And be careful not to get hurt with all those twigs scattered everywhere!"

Petalfur nodded, kicking dirt over the vole to protect it from any creature that might think of stealing it away. Then, she got back to marking the borders ahead of Icetail.

"All prey is welcomed," said Rainwhisker with a dip of his head. "Especially since we need strength."

Icetail nodded with a sigh. MoonClan was *still* hungry. He wished that prey would come to the forests quicker, even though their conditions improved since leaf-bare. But suddenly, a yowl sounded---but it was cut short with a loud thud. Icetail raced from his spot. "What happened?" he demanded.

Flameheart's voice groaned in pain. "I tripped," came a response.

Icetail looked around, and suddenly spotted a dark hole in the ground. "Flameheart?" meowed Icetail with worry as he looked into the darkness. His pelt bristled.

"I'm down here!" Flameheart reassured. "I think I'm okay. I can get up." In an instant, the ginger tom emerged to the top and shook his

pelt clean. "The ground suddenly split open and sucked me up."

Petalfur bristled. "What?"

Flameheart nodded. "The dirt . . . crumbled under my paws. Or maybe they were leaves?"

"Whatever it is, we have to report it to Brightstar," said Rainwhisker, padding up.

Ashtail held his tail up to stop Rainwhisker. "Hold on there, don't go any closer," he warned. "It could be dangerous." He looked up to Icetail. "What do we do?"

"Why ask me?" Icetail murmured.

"Because you're the patrol leader," he pointed with an obvious tone. "Patrol leaders are supposed to lead their patrols. Hence the name."

Icetail rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah." He observed the hole, and then his gaze landed on Flameheart. "You didn't hurt yourself down there, right?"

"I kind of cramped my paws," Flameheart admitted.

Icetail nodded. "Okay. I guess we should head back and tell Brightstar about this before any cat gets hurt," he decided. "And you should go check out the medicine den while you are at it."

Flameheart nodded with a sigh. "No kidding." He limped ahead, followed by Ashtail and Petalfur. Icetail went after them with Rainwhisker. He still felt unease from the incident.

This is ridiculous, but that hole was awfully dark, he thought. *I wonder if the prophecy literally means that the darkness was never meant to be . . . .*

Chapter Twenty Two

Edited ✔

I haven't updated in a while. Right now it's like 7:00 am. I actually got up early to do this :) please enjoy, and I will post another chapter very soon to make up for this big delay!

The sun was rising fast, and it was almost dawn when Icetail and his patrol got back to camp. Most cats were already starting to wake up. He looked around and spotted Sparrowheart sharing tongues with Brightstar right beside the leader's den. He padded up to them with Ashtail at his heels. Flameheart went straight for the medicine den.

"Hi Brightstar," he said with respect, dipping his head to both the leader and deputy.

Brightstar stopped sharing tongues with Sparrowheart. "Oh, hi Icetail. How was the patrol?"

"The patrol was okay," Ashtail interjected. "But something rather urgent happened."

"It wasn't that urgent!" called Rainwhisker, who was close by with Petalfur as she placed away the vole that she caught earlier.

Brightstar nodded. "Okay. Go on."

"We were having a normal night patrol—clearing out the brambles and sticks from the other night's storm, strengthening our borders—but then the earth crippled beneath Flameheart. Now there's a hole in the ground near MarshClan," Icetail informed.

"It looked more like a tunnel since it was so dark," Ashtail interrupted.

Sparrowheart looked up, interest flickering in his eyes. "Really?" he asked. "Well, that sounds dangerous. Another cat can fall in. Is

Flameheart okay?"

"I'm fine!" called Flameheart from the medicine den.

Brightstar sighed. "I guess you should arrange a patrol to check out the inside," she told Sparrowheart.

"On it," Sparrowheart said. "Icetail, you go on it, okay? Since you know where it is, after all. And take Squirrelpaw with you since he's small, and . . . how about Sharpfang?"

Icetail's ears flattened. "Why them two?" he asked. His paws shuffled uncomfortably.

"Squirrelpaw will be better at fitting through small spaces, and Sharpfang is a good fighter; a good claw to a paw," Sparrowheart replied, with a twitch to his whiskers at the last statement. Icetail almost rolled his eyes.

Brightstar nodded of approval. "It's a good patrol. Report to me as soon as you get back."

"Okay," Icetail found himself murmuring. He wasn't thrilled to be going out with Sharpfang, but the bigger problem was how dark and mysterious that hole was. "What if it isn't as dangerous as we think it to be?"

"Then come back to camp, flea-brain," Dewfang meowed, thumping Icetail's head with his paw. "Hey, brother."

Icetail turned abruptly. "Oh, hi," he said, startled. "Where did you come from?"

Dewfang motioned to the warriors den. "I heard some action going on in my sleep. Everything okay?" He looked between Sparrowheart and Brightstar.

"Everything's fine—" Icetail began, but his father cut him off.

"Go lead a patrol in MarshClan later on," Sparrowheart said to Dewfang. "Take careful warriors with you and make sure you avoid the spot where the ground crippled."

"Where's that suppose to be?" asked Dewfang. "Is this what the fuss is about?"

"It's near MarshClan, but on our territory," Ashtail said. "Like Sparrowheart said."

Sparrowheart flicked his tail dismissively. "Go on. I have things to do," he meowed. "We haven't got all day."

Icetail nodded and padded away. He headed over to Sharpfang, who was stretching in the warm sun. "Sharpfang?" he asked.

Sharpfang turned to Icetail. "Hmm?"

"You and Squirrelpaw have to go on a patrol with me. We leave as soon as possible."

"*Just* us?" he asked, clearly not surprised. "Why just two warriors and an apprentice?"

"We have to scout the crippled ground by MarshClan," Icetail explained. At least Sharpfang wasn't starting his drama, or at least didn't seem to be planning to. "We leave now."

"I guess I have to," muttered the tom. "Squirrelpaw!"

In a matter of seconds, Squirrelpaw emerged from the apprentice den and ran up to Sharpfang and Icetail. "Oh, Sharpfang!" he said. "Did either of you call?" He turned between the two warriors.

"You're expected to go on a mission with us," Icetail meowed.

"A mission!" gasped Squirrelpaw. "What kind of mission? A battle mission? A *spy* mission?" He bounced up and down. "It'll be my first!"

"We're exploring," said Icetail. "Might not be as fun as you want it to be. But you are expected to go with us."

"I'm so excited!" he exclaimed.

Sharpfang sighed. "Well, Icetail, if we are leaving, I think we should

go now," snapped the older warrior coolly. "Might as well get this mission over with so I can share a nice vole with Sagepelt."

Sagepelt and Sharpfang are mates, Icetail recalled. He didn't want to question it, but he wondered deep down *how* in the first place Sharpfang was able to attract such a nice she-cat. Every one in MoonClan knew that more kits would be coming, especially with the warm weather approaching.

"Let's go. And tell your mentor where you are going," Icetail ordered.

Squirrelpaw nodded and bounded away to the small group of senior warriors talking together. Sharpfang and Icetail waited in silence for a few heartbeats until the apprentice returned.

"Ready!" he said eagerly.

Icetail nodded and lead his patrol out of camp. Sharpfang was still being quiet; Squirrelpaw jumpy. No cat said a word during the whole trip all the way back to MarshClan. Icetail looked around. It was easier to see now that it was dawn and the sun had risen.

"So where's this dumb hole?" muttered Sharpfang. "I bet it's nothing. Brightstar is too cautious."

"Well, you don't know," snarled Icetail. "What if there's badgers at the bottom? If it isn't taken care of now then we'd have a badger raid and our Clanmates would be in danger."

"Oh, badgers!" squeaked Squirrelpaw with excitement. "I want to fight a badger! I'll tell Silverpaw all about it. Ha! I bet she is going to be super jealous."

Sharpfang looked down to Squirrelpaw with disgust. "Jealousy isn't a good thing, stupid," he growled.

Squirrelpaw's head ducked in embarrassment. "Oh . . . I-I'm sorry, I didn't mean to . . ."

Icetail shoved Sharpfang away from Squirrelpaw. "Don't be so harsh on him! He is only a young apprentice. He will learn, but not like

that, Sharpfang."

Sharpfang heaved a sigh. "Whatever," he muttered. "Where's the hole anyway?"

"It's—" Icetail looked around. He'd seen it a moment ago . . . where was it? Then, he finally spotted it, a small opening in the ground, yet big enough to swallow a cat whole. "There it is."

Sharpfang turned and padded up, sniffing inside it. "It smells like rock, gravel and water. Rain water," he murmured, hostility gone. "And something disgusting. Like a twoleg monster."

"Maybe it rains down there?" suggested Squirrelpaw with his voice low. He was scared of Sharpfang, Icetail noticed.

"That's a dumb idea," Sharpfang growled. "Use your head for smarter things, Squirrelpaw."

Squirrelpaw ducked his head down, ashamed. But Icetail nudged him. "Hey, you never know," he said to Ripplefur's son.

The apprentice brightened up. "Thanks, Icetail. Are we going down or what?"

"Yes, let me just test something out first . . ." Sharpfang said, with a large rock in his mouth. Now what was he doing? Sharpfang dropped the rock down the hole, and a tumbling sound was heard. The rock kept tumbling down, down, down, until it was not heard anymore. "This is definetly a tunnel by the sounds of it. Made of rock all the way down."

That was actually smart! Icetail thought with surprise.

"Go first," said Sharpfang to Icetail, stepping out of the way.

Icetail snapped his head in Sharpfang's direction. "What?" he asked, bristling. *It's dark down there* . . . Icetail did not want to admit it but he was afraid—dark areas and closed spaces caused his fur to bristle with unease.

"Just go," hissed Sharpfang, "or else I'm gonna have to push you

down there myself. You're such a pain!"

Icetail glared at Sharpfang. *Why choose now to be such a fox-heart?* he thought with irritation. "Fine, I'm going," he muttered at last, not wanting to seem like a scaredy-mouse. Sharpfang grunted, and Icetail slowly began to pad down the slope.

But suddenly, his paw slipped on a pebble, and his yowl of surprise was cut short as he tumbled down. The hole was eating him alive! *Oh StarClan, help*! he thought, his mind yowling to StarClan's heavens.

Chapter Twenty Three

Edited ✔

Sorry for the delays, everyone! It's just that my baby brother was recently born so I was spending a lot of time with him and I forgot to update. But here!! :) I made time for you all !

Icetail quickly unsheathed his claws and grabbed onto the hard rock, his breath catching in his throat. His claws managed to cling on the rock, but he knew that it wouldn't hold for long. Sharptail's eyes widened and he scrambled after his Clanmate.

"Be careful, you stupid furball!" he shouted, inching closer down the slope.

Icetail snarled. "This is no time to be insulting me! *Help me*!" cried the gray-furred warrior. His back paws tried to help give him a boost up, but there was nothing to climb on to. The slope was very steep. If Icetail fell, not even StarClan would know what's down there! He could fall onto hard rock, for all he knew, and die!

It sickened and panicked him just by the thought of it.

He felt Sharpfang's teeth sink into his scruff and haul him up. Icetail couldn't breathe under the pressure for a brief moment, until the senior warrior spat him out onto the forest floor. Both of them were panting while Squirrelpaw trembled with fear in the background.

"You useless apprentice," muttered Sharpfang. "He should of at least helped me."

Icetail didn't retort back to Sharpfang's mean statement. Squirrelpaw didn't seem like he even heard it, and Icetail was too winded to speak.

"N-now how are we going to see what is down there?" asked the apprentice with fear. "Maybe it's too steep for whatever is down

there to come up . . ."

"You don't know if it can grow wings and fly out," snarled Sharpfang. "It's a mission I must carry out."

"We *all* must carry it out," coughed Icetail as he caught his breath. He staggered upright, and coughed again, clearing his chest. Then he peered down in the hole again and gulped. The darkness had almost swallowed him. The thought came back to his mind, one that haunted him for long; *what if the prophechy was literal darkness?* Would this be it?

"You sure you can go down?" Sharpfang asked. "You just fell. And now I know where this dumb hole is so I do not need your help."

"I never asked for you to concern yourself over me," snapped Icetail, already stepping back in. "I know my footing better. Let's go."

Sharpfang gave a long sigh. "I suppose so. Squirrelpaw, stay behind me. Keep your nose on my tail, or something like that. I need to know you are there."

" 'Kay," mumbled the apprentice, sticking close to Sharpfang.

"Go on, *hero*," growled the warrior. "Don't fall this time."

"I know that!" Icetail's tail lashed in annoyance. "And don't call me that." Sometimes he felt like he just wanted to *shred* Sharpfang, but obviously that was out of any question. It was beyond his ability, and hurting a Clanmate would be the ultimate wrong he could ever commit.

Icetail padded forward down the slope, carefully, but this time did not slip. He took a deep breath, and looked around. There was a platform with a nearly-smooth stone top. He turned to Sharpfang and motioned to it. "I'm going to see if that is safe," he announced. Icetail prepared himself, then leaped, landing right down onto the platform as he held his ground for a moment.

"Is it safe?" Sharpfang called impatiently.

"Calm down," Icetail snorted. He tested the platform by jumping in

place, and when it did not budge, he nodded. "Okay come on now. One at a time."

"Go first," Sharpfang told Squirrelpaw. The apprentice nodded, and decided to leap. He landed right onto the platform, and scrambled up, rushing over to Icetail and pressing himself close. Sharpfang came next, and landed right next to Icetail with grace.

They looked down. The slope wasn't steep anymore; they were safe.

"Look," gasped Squirrelpaw, pointing with his tail. Both warriors tensed and glanced over to where the apprentice was pointing as if a badger was waiting. "There are two tunnels. So that's what's down here!"

"We still don't know what's *in* there," mumbled Sharpfang. "We should split up."

"But Sparrowheart put us three together for a reason," Squirrelpaw immediately interrupted. "I mean, err—I don't think it's safe—"

Sharpfang cut him off. "Don't be such a scaredy-mouse!"

Icetail stepped up to Squirrelpaw's defense yet again. That apprentice had better stop getting on Sharpfang's nerves! *I can't defend you forever*! "Sparrowheart did put is together for a reason. Squirrelpaw is small and could be used for small spaces and you are a good fighter. So we *should* stay together."

"Come on, then!" he sighed. "We might as well move along because you two don't want to separate. This could be a waste of time."

Icetail snorted with annoyance.

"You're as defiant as your mother," muttered Sharpfang.

"Don't talk about her like that," snapped Icetail. "What do you know about her, anyways . . ." He remembered his last memory of her, dying on the borders of DarkClan and MoonClan. *She's brave, strong and fierce*, he recalled. *She was the best mother in all the Clans*.

"I know a lot about your mother," he meowed. "We were

apprentices together. You should be the one talking."

"Humph," said Icetail, pushing past the two. "Let's just continued. I want to get this patrol over with."

"I smell something putrid," Squirrelpaw piped up.

Sharpfang sneezed with disgust. "Something like a Thunderpath. Again, it's that Twoleg monster scent."

Icetail considered what he said. *They're right! Something* does *smell bad.*

"Whatever it is, it must not be good," said Icetail. "This is the worst scent I've caught in days!" He wrinkled up his nose as Squirrelpaw bounded up ahead in the darkness. "Watch where you are going," Icetail warned. "There may be another slope."

Squirrelpaw froze in his spot from up ahead. "You might want to see this."

Sharpfang stopped for a moment before he nodded and ran up ahead. His fur bristled as he took his spot beside the apprentice. "StarClan. . ." His eyes were wide as he stared.

Icetail ran up ahead. The air became denser and more stagnant the farther he traveled down the tunnel. It also became strangely lighter and easier to see, as if there was daylight waiting on the other side. But what he came to see was nothing as comforting as daylight. Instead, a large cave, perhaps the size of the MoonClan camp itself —or even larger—towered above and below them. All around the cave he could see Twoleg things, from giant monsters to things that looked like tree-cutters, including other contraptions that he'd never seen before. Twolegs stood around the cave, shouting things to each other he could not understand; sitting inside the bellies of the monsters as if the monsters were waiting for their instructions.

Icetail could understand now that below the forest, something was stirring other than the battle with DarkClan. And it was not something good.

Above the putrid smell of the Twoleg monsters, he could also scent

something else.

DarkClan!

His fur bristled. *What are they doing here? And what are these Twolegs doing to our forest?*

So, finally, an update!!! I've been making things shorter, because, as you know, I am becoming a busy, busy person :|

IF YOU DIDNT KNOW;
monsters are things like cars. Tree-cutters are bulldozers. And those extra contraptions are more human things that are meant to destroy.

Stay tuned for chapter 24 :)

Chapter Twenty Four

Edited ✔

Icetail's eyes were wide as he stared down at the cave full of Twoleg contraptions and monsters. Constant shouts of the Twolegs themselves were heard over the loud ruckus of destruction.

"What is this?" snapped Sharpfang with disbelief, staring down at the cave.

Icetail turned to him, and then turned back down, but before he could say a word, Squirrelpaw immediately responded. "What if it's DarkClan's doing?" His voice was but a low whisper, and it quivered in fear.

"Stupid. Even DarkClan is afraid of Twolegs," Sharpfang hissed to Squirrelpaw. Squirrelpaw's fear must of been irritating the short-tempered warrior. "And keep your voice down. They will find us."

"Wait, Sharpfang," said Icetail. "The cave stretches up to CloudClan, MoonClan and DarkClan all in one. Isn't that strange? And how in StarClan's name did the Twolegs bring all their monsters down here? What if they tear up the forest when they try to leave?" Fear filled in his heart too, as well as grief just at the very thought of loosing his beautiful forest home.

"Don't worry," was all Sharpfang said. "Let's get a better vantage point. Maybe we will see something that can help us understand."

"And we should hunt," added Squirrelpaw. "We need to eat soon."

"I doubt that there will be prey down here," Icetail meowed. "This place is loud, and it reeks of Twoleg monster stench."

Sharpfang grunted with agreement and leaped up to a taller rock, getting a tiny bit of a better view. Icetail didn't follow, because he knew that now they were going to have to find a clue on their own.

If they went back to Brightstar empty-pawed, who knows what patrol would be sent down here? Some cat could get hurt, so he knew that his patrol now had better find something worth staying away from.

He padded down a slope with his belly low to the ground. For once, he was thankful that his fur was a dark gray color. It blended in perfectly with the rocky shadow background. His belly fur grazed the cool ground as he crept upwards.

He felt Squirrelpaw's nose on his tail as the apprentice stayed close by, not wanting to get separated from a warrior.

He suddenly heard a loud *crash*, and Icetail jumped with fear. For a moment, he thought that the Twolegs had spotted him. But then he realized that something must've broke or fallen. because a large cylinder-shape stone was flat on the ground.

As Icetail got closer and closer, he realized something more and more. The Twolegs weren't just down here to destroy the cave, but they were also constructing something. But what?

The ceiling overhead rumbled, and he wondered if it would collapse right then and there. He turned to Sharpfang, and the two warriors exchanged a long glance. For once, Sharpfang looked like he was thinking the same thing as Icetail: *Get out of here!*

They nodded to each other, and burst from their spot, dishing towards the entrance they came from. Icetail panted, breathing in the disgusting air, wishing that he was back overground. Above the putrid smell, the underground pressure caused his ears to pop. He had to get out of there!

Once he reached the tunnel, he almost collapsed from dizziness.

"What's wrong?" Sharpfang demanded.

"I can't . . . breathe too well . . ." Icetail coughed.

Sharpfang nodded. "Alright. We must hurry."

Icetail stopped him. "No, wait. First, we have to patch up that hole!

Worst things that could possibly happen—a Twoleg may find it's way here and wound up *straight* into out territory, or the scent may unleash and scare away all the prey. If we leave this tunnel open, only StarClan knows what dangers it can unleash!"

"I bet this ruckus has *already* scared off the prey," mumbled Sharpfang bitterly. "Squirrelpaw! Hurry and gather rocks and ivy, help me patch up the hole. Icetail, you rest."

"No, let me help," Icetail croaked.

Sharpfang sighed. "Well, I can't stop you. Then help me if you want but take it easy."

Icetail nodded and got up from his spot. He picked up a pebble in his mouth and began to push a big rock towards the hole that led to the tunnel. It was barely enough, but it was something. He set them into place as Squirrelpaw tied the ivy all around as a barrier.

The patrol collected more rocks, patching it up as good as they could, until they decided it was safe enough to leave.

Sharpfang led the way up to the tunnel, but abruptly stopped, causing Icetail to bump into his Clanmate's haunches.

"Hey, what's the hold up?" Icetail asked.

Sharpfang growled of frustration. "There's a problem," he meowed.

Icetail sighed. "What *now*?"

"I think I forgot which way we came down." Sharpfang stepped out of the way, revealing two tunnels. "I don't know, but we must of not noticed the extra tunnel when we ran down here."

"Try scenting it," Icetail ordered.

Sharpfang glared at him. "I already tried! I'm not stupid. But it's hard with that putrid Twoleg stench in my nose."

"They must both lead in our territory," Squirrelpaw suggested. "Besides, I think it's better if we don't come out of the one we came

from in the first place, so we can check what's in the other direction before we go back."

"I bet it will be nightfall soon," Icetail sighed.

"And we all need," Sharpfang added.

Squirrelpaw sighed of disappointment that the older warriors weren't listening to his suggestions yet again. "We've really been down here *that* long?"

"Most likely," Sharptail muttered.

Suddenly, a wave of smoke and stench that had escaped the barrier from down the rocks, and Icetail broke into a coughing fit. Sharpfang and Squirrelpaw seemed rather uncomfortable as well. *We have to get out of here*! Icetail thought as he bristled up.

"Let's go!" called Sharpfang, beginning to run up a random tunnel. Icetail couldn't help but follow him. Squirrelpaw followed right at his haunches, racing up the rocky path desperate escape the smoke that filled their lungs.

"I think I can smell the forest," called Sharpfang from up ahead.

The patrol ran up the long tunnel for a few moments, until finally, the sky of the setting sun was in view from the inside of the tunnel. Out of nowhere, an image of a mountain suddenly flashed in Icetail's head, and the gray warrior froze for a brief moment, a little stunned.

"Come on," insisted Squirrelpaw as he realized that Icetail was lagging behind. "We're almost out!"

Icetail nodded and forced himself out of the tunnel, wondering what had happened. An image of a mountain? As soon as he left the tunnel, however, he realized one thing; they were not in a forest. In fact, they were *above* the forest!

The outline of treetops could be made out for a long distance. The air tasted crisper, felt cooler, and the sounds of the sky extended widely in echos. He stared the sky in shock, taking in the various

colors that he normally didn't get to see underneath the trees. From a flaming red and orange that tainted the horizon, to a blend of purple, pink and blue that faded and became darker along with the night sky, Icetail felt amazed to be witnessing such a thing.

There was one explanation for this.

"Are we on the MoonClan mountain? The one that our territory extends to?" gasped Squirrelpaw, staring down the cliff with widened eyes.

Icetail looked down, and faintly saw the camp where they all resided. "It . . . seems to be so. That tunnel lead us up here!"

Chapter Twenty Five

Edited ✔

Hello :D I hope this longer chapter makes up for the past few shorter ones. I never do one and a half pages, really. Makes me uncomfortable. I prefer to write more . . . well, anyways, enjoy chapter twenty five! And wow I got this up in less time than I expected it to be up.

The vast view from the mountain had Icetail captured.

He had an overview of the camp and of the entire forest from even though it was hard to see clearly. He could even see beyond—he could see StreamClan's willow tree, DarkClan's forest, and the large moor where CloudClan resided. He pressed closer to Squirrelpaw in shock.

Icetail's thoughts snapped at the sound of Sharpfang's voice. "Squirrelpaw, come on, we have to find something to eat," said the grumpy senior warrior. "Icetail, perhaps because of your breathing you should look around for a shelter?"

"You think we'll stay the night?" questioned Icetail. "And who put you in charge?"

"*Yes,* we *are* stating the night because we are all *tired*, Icetail," Sharpfang growled in response. "Don't cause a scene. I am doing what's best. Besides, Brightstar didn't really appoint you as the patrol leader, either."

"Nor did she to you," retorted Icetail.

"Um, I'll go ahead. . ." said Squirrelpaw awkwardly, not wanting to be part of the drama.

"Whatever," muttered Sharpfang, stalking away.

Icetail sighed and went an opposite direction. He wanted to find a place to rest, but *not* because Sharpfang told him to. He wanted to see if he could rest, and maybe dream about the prophecy again. For a few moments, Icetail weakly walked around in search of any sort of refuge, until he heard a low rustle.

He stopped in his place. "Who's there?" He stood straighter despite the pain in his chest.

Slowly, a young she-cat emerged from out of the bushes. She had beautiful off-white fur and glimmering yellow eyes that pierced into Icetail's gaze. There was also a small but noticeable tear in her ear. She stood face-to-face with Icetail, her ears slightly drawn back in a defensive stance.

"Wh-who are you?" she demanded. She was obviously around the age of an apprentice. Perhaps a little older than Squirrelpaw and Silverpaw, but much younger than Icetail.

"I'm a Clan cat," he explained calmly. "I came from a tunnel that led up here."

Her eyes widened. "So you must have known the way to find us here! Someone must have told you, right?"

There are cats that live up here? he thought with surprise. *I thought the mountain was dangerous!*

Icetail shook his head in response to the stranger's sudden excitement. "I came from the forest down below, the one you see at the base of the mountain. A tunnel appeared in the ground, you see, and we went to investigate. But somehow, the tunnel ended up leading here. We'd gotten lost."

"That sounds terrible! Maybe you'd like to meet some of my family. They could certainly help you."

He thought for a moment. *So it's true!* The mountain *wasn't* desolate. But what if the cats who lived here were hostile? Icetail feared not ever coming back to MoonClan at all, leaving Brightar and the rest of the Clan in the darkness. If he didn't find his way back, then

they'd certainly end up going through the tunnels like he did. He couldn't let that happen. Besides, as he observed the young she-cat, he decided she was friendly enough to trust.

"If it's not too far, I'd love help . . . I'm here with two other cats, you see," Icetail informed after a brief moment.

"Two other gray toms, right? I think I saw them. Maybe we should let them be. They must not know about me or the family; mama says it's not safe to talk to cats we've never seen," she explained.

Then what does that make me? he thought with amusement, but kept those thoughts silent. "Well, any information you're willing to give would be helpful. Perhaps you can take me to someone like you mentioned before."

"Understood," said the white she-cat. She began to lead him away without another word. She didn't even mention her name.

Icetail followed her anyways, desperate for a place to rest, and curious about finding some answers. As he followed her, he couldn't help but take in his surroundings. The trees were unalike the ones in the Clan forests. He always thought that the distant trees on the mountain were pine, but the scent tasted completely different. There were also a few animals he'd rarely ever on the territories—a few deer that he spotted in that flocked one side of the mountain, that looked slightly different from the forest deer; different, larger birds that soared above the tall jagged peaks; and different plants too, including herbs and flowers he knew that Sweetpaw would take interest in.

It amazed Icetail how different everything was. He thought that since the forest and the mountain was very close, they'd be the same, but he was utterly wrong by the beauty of it. Everything he saw almost stole his breath away.

The white she-cat lead him on for a few more moments in silence, before rising up her voice again. "You came from a whole group of cats, right?" she asked him.

Icetail nodded. "We call them Clans. I come from MoonClan."

"Wow," she said in amazement. "How are the Clans like? I've heard stories about them but I've never stepped paw off this mountain, so I know nothing but life here."

"Living in a Clan is good," he explained. "We all trust one another, support one another, and share duties. There are five Clans, too. MoonClan, which is my Clan—MarshClan, CloudClan, DarkClan and StreamClan. We are all organized by kin and ways of living."

"Amazing!" she said, turning around to catch his eye. He could see that they were glittering with interest. "Living in a Clan must be fun."

He shook his head and she tilted hers to the side in confusion. Icetail sighed, knowing he'd have to explain the situation. "It's not all that great at times," Icetail murmured grimly. "Right now MoonClan is at war with DarkClan. The other Clans have a small involvement with it too, especially CloudClan. Things were pretty tough for us. Sometimes living in a Clan can cost you your life. I've lost some that I miss dearly."

He thought of Featherbreeze again.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she meowed sympathetically. "My name is Gold, by the way." She looked up at him once more and he suddenly understood her name—because her eyes gleamed a brilliant golden yellow.

"I'm Icetail," he said.

"What a weird name," Gold commented. "*This* is super weird. We never ever get visitors. It's so cool knowing that there's a whole other world out there! Despite all the bad things you mentioned, it seems really fun. I want to visit one day. Say, can I visit one day? Maybe MoonClan will like me. Do you think so—"

"Shh," Icetail suddenly cut her off. She babbled a lot, but he didn't mind. What he did mind was the feeling of being crept up on. "Who's there?" he called out.

"Wait, is someone there?" she whispered. "How could you tell?"

The cat was upwind from them, so he didn't catch a scent. What he *did* hear was faint pawsteps very close by, just beyond the shrubbery.

A cat emerged out of the bushes the same way as Gold had when he first encountered her. This newcomer was a tortoiseshell she-cat with many gray streaks along her fur, indicating her older age. Perhaps she was even Brightstar's age. Her eyes were a fierce green like the greenleaf leaves of the forest, but had a special soft tone that left warmth in her stare.

She purred as she met with his gaze. "Welcome to the mountain, young warrior. You must be Icetail."

* * *

Icetail sat next to Gold in the cave in which they resided. The tortoiseshell cat—whose name was Bells—sat in front of them alongside another she-cat, presumably her sister.

He learned that their parents had died a few moons ago, so now it was just Bells, her daughter Red, and Red's kits—Gold, Thorn, and Moon—along with Red's mate, Hawk. It amazed Icetail how small their living group was. The Clan was much larger in comparison to this family of lone cats.

"So you've finally come, huh, Icetail?" Bells purred. "I've waited for this moment so long. But I only figured that you'd come after you knew the prophecy of darkness."

His ears perked with interest. "What? You knew about it?"

Bells dipped her head in response.

"W-we'll, what drove me here were the Twolegs," Icetail said gravely. "I never expected to come up the mountain. I do not understand the prophecy itself, and I understand I'm the cat StarClan chose to tell it to."

"I understand," Bells said.

"What's an apprentice? Is it a special kind of warrior? Are you

spies?" asked Gold eagerly.

Red cuffed Gold on the ear. "Hush up! This matter is important, and it does not involve you," she scolded. Gold, embarrassed, looked down to her paws. Red nodded with satisfaction.

Bells purred softly. "Yes. We heard the construction from up here."

"Construction?" Icetail asked, tilting his head. He knew what it meant, but he couldn't grasp his mind around what they could possibly construct in a cave. Better yet, what that would mean for the Clans.

"Yes. The other day, Thorn, Hawk and I traveled down there and discovered what they were doing. We spent a long time observing them. They are tearing right under the forests."

Icetail nodded sadly. "I know."

"Anyways," Bells went on, "I am sure you have questions. As far as I know, there is nothing we can do about the Twolegs."

He looked down to Red's three kits. Gold and Thorn were snapping at each other, but one of them, Moon, was staring at Icetail, observing him with interest.

Bells must of noticed. "Red, can you take the kits hunting?" she asked her sister. "I have important matters to discuss with Icetail."

Red nodded. "Come on, kits," she meowed. "Let's go find Hawk. He's probably trying to catch an eagle all on his own. You won't want to miss that!"

Gold gasped. "No way!"

"I wanna help!" exclaimed Thorn.

The two young cats dashed out of the entrance after their mother. Moon silently followed them, and cast one glance back at Icetail, which looked rather shy, before running after her mother and littermates.

Bells *mrrowed* soft laughter. "I think Moon likes you."

Icetail laughed as well, but it was short. He was not here to think about kit's-play. "Anyway, if you know so much about the prophecy, I need answers."

Bells nodded. "Yes, right. Answers . . ." She sighed. Icetail wondered if he was pressuring her, but when she looked up, he knew that he wasn't just by the same fierce look in her eyes as earlier. "*The darkness was never meant to be, and two cats high and proud will lead and destroy*. One of those very cats is you, Icetail. I do not know if you will lead, I do not know if you will destroy. Most importantly, I do not know the identity of the second cat of the prophecy, but do I know something that could be useful to you."

Icetail felt a little disappointed that he didn't get the answers he most anticipated. But he inched closer, ears pricked with interest. "I'll listen."

"This cat—the second one—is like blood. You're supposedly very close to this cat," she said.

Icetail thought for a moment. *Like blood. Does she mean some cat who I am related to?* "The only cats that have my blood in MoonClan are my brother and father. There could be more, but I wouldn't know them."

She nodded. "Well then, Icetail, keep a close eye on your brother, it's more likely that you're missing things in which you cannot see."

Icetail stood as still as prey. What did she mean by *that*? And how was it possible that Dewfang could be the second cat in the prophecy? What would that mean for the two, as brothers? He shook his head from all these thoughts in frustration. With answers always came more questions! Can't somebody just tell him all that there is to know? Then things wouldn't be so difficult!

"And," Bells added, "don't forget to watch out for yourself, too. You can be any of those cats as well."

"I . . . know." One cat would lead, one would destroy. It was obvious

to him what those roles in the prophecy meant, but it wasn't obvious what role he would take. After all, he wasn't perfect. Just because he was the one who had received the prophecy, it did not mean he was the good cat. He had still not forgotten when he snapped a long time ago when his mother died, and how it drove him into brutally killing the DarkClan warrior, Fallentail. All cats were evil and all cats were good; some just more than others.

Despite how difficult it was to imagine himself as the enemy, it was still possible.

"Icetail," Bells softly murmured. "I think it is time for you to go. Your friends must be looking for you and your Clan must be worried."

"I know."

"It won't take you long to get down back to MoonClan if you take the mountain rocks," she informed. "I can show you and your friends the way."

"Thank you, Bells." He dipped his head. "For the answers, for your kindness. I will never forget you."

She felt her nose touch his head, just like a leader would do to a newly-appointed apprentice.

When she pulled away, he raised his head and looked outside the cave to see the slowly-setting sun. It was halfway through the horizon. In no time at all, it would be completely dark, with nothing but the moon and Silverpelt to brighten up their path.

Bells stood up and began to leave the cave, Icetail trailing after her. He was deep in thought. *I haven't given it much thought, but I wonder how Bells knows so much about the prophecy?* he wondered. *Does StarClan share dreams with her too*?

He stared at the back of her with curiosity.

Perhaps she used to be a Clan cat a long time ago . . .

He followed her as she easily tracked down his friends. Sharpfang

and Squirrelpaw were seen sharing a squirrel. A spare mouse rested at Squrrielpaw's foot. They must be saving it for him.

"Hey!" called Icetail. "I'm back!"

Sharpfang looked up, and immediately narrowed his eyes when he saw Bells. "Who's she?"

"A cat who lives on the mountains," Icetail meowed. "She is a good cat, don't worry."

"I'm not worrying," Sharpfang sneered. "Here, have your share. We are going home now. Does your mountain friend know a way down here without going through that cave?"

"Yes, I do," Bells said, undisturbed by Sharpfang's rudeness.

"Good." Sharpfang swallowed down his squirrel. Icetail took a couple bites out of his mouse, which was all it took to finish it. His stomach felt sustained enough.

The group was just about to leave when they were stopped by Bell's approaching family. Hawk was carrying an eagle in his mouth, and Thorn held a plump vole.

"Were you just leaving?" Red asked Icetail, looking directly at him.

Icetail nodded. "Yes, we live just down the mountain."

Gold's ears perked up. "And all these Clan cats live there, right? Oooooh, are these other two cats Clan cats, too? Wow! They're so cool! The big one's especially muscular. So strong," she said with awe. She poked at his muscles in his forelegs with her nose, and he sharply drew back.

"Don't touch me," snapped Sharpfang.

Gold's eyes widened. "Wow! So cool!"

"You think everything is cool," snorted Moon.

"Well *you* obviously think so about Icetail. Look at the way you're

staring at him!" Gold retorted, proud of her come-back.

"Take that back!" snapped Moon, getting embarrassed. Icetail couldn't help but laugh a little. He remembered being of that age with Dewfang when all the apprentices thought Silverpaw had feelings for Icetail. *Maturity simply comes with age*, he decided. For now, it was good that the two young cats could at like kits.

"We are almost to the edge of the cliff where you can climb down. Let's go," said Bells.

Icetail nodded and followed her. The trip wasn't long, just as Bells said, and Icetail realized that they weren't actually far from the ground. MoonClan was in plain sight. Excitement filled his belly as he began to descend. He knew that he, Sharpfang and Squirrelpaw must get down before the sun sets. If it's dark, one of them may loose their footing and plummet to their death. Icetail certainly did not want to see his Clanmates hurt, no matter how mean Sharpfang could be.

"Wait. Before you go, Clan cats," Bells said, stopping all three of them.

Icetail turned up. Bell's fierce eyes that constantly switched emotion now seemed sad. "I . . . I want Red, Hawk and their kits to go with you."

Sharpfang's eyes widened. "Five cats at once joining MoonClan? We normally don't accept strangers," he meowed, his voice not as harsh as Icetail thought it would be.

"I know. But they can't stay here anymore—the mountain isn't safe —"

"That's nonsense! You're our family, Bells!" said Red.

"That's right!" Hawk put in. "Besides, what do the kits think?"

"I like the mountain," mumbled Thorn.

"What? You scared of a little change? I think that living in the Clan would be so cool! Can we, mama? Can we? I really would like to!"

Gold exclaimed.

Moon purred a little after casting a glance at Icetail. "I wouldn't mind."

"Wait. I don't know what Brightstar would say. The decision is not up to us," warned Icetail. "That is too sudden change for MoonClan."

"Tell Brightstar that I had sent these cats," Bells said. "She knows me. I'm sure she will accept them in the Clan." She sighed and looked to her paws.

They know each other? But how? thought Icetail, astonished. Suddenly, the way she looked and acted made a little more sense. *Don't tell me that they're sisters . . .*

"I won't stop anyone," Sharpfang meowed casually, beginning to make leaps down the slopes carefully.

Red sighed. "What about you, Bells?"

"This mountain was my home from the start with. I need to be alone. I don't think I can join a Clan, to start with. And it has to do with those dreams, Red." She paused. "I need more time alone. Really *alone*. That's why I came here many seasons ago. Why I left the Clans in the first place . . ."

Icetail's eyes widened. *So it's true!*

Red's eyes gleamed with sadness. "I understand, Bells."

"If that's the case, we'll depart with the Clan cats," said Hawk. "We'll send word to Brightstar that you said hello, too."

"Thank you," purred Bells. She turned to Icetail and sighed. "It was an honor speaking to you, young warrior. I will see you again one day. May StarClan light your path, Icetail."

Chapter Twenty Six

Edited ✔

During the whole trip down the mountain, Gold talked her whiskers off. Icetail remained silent, constantly responding to things that Moon had to say to him. Thorn seemed a little upset and so did Red, but Hawk altogether looked eager.

After a while, the group finally made it down to the base of the mountain. A quarter moon was high in the sky—everyone was becoming quiet.

Icetail was happy to finally be in his own territory after a long day. His paws were aching, his eyes felt heavy, and his stomach growled. The mouse hadn't sustained him as long as he thought it would. But he knew that he would have to use the remaining energy to convince Brightstar to let these five cats join MoonClan.

He heard a few cats padding through the forests. He easily caught the scent of Dewfang . . . and some cat else. Perhaps it was Dawnstripe?

Well, Dawnstripe had always had her eyes on Dewfang. He looked in the direction they were going. They were quite a distance away, but since Icetail had good vision, he could easily spot them. They could not see Icetail's patrol since their backs were turned.

But Icetail could figure what they might be talking about.

Dawnstripe probably wants Dewfang as a mate. He's lucky . . . With all these dreams, I never had thoughts about having kits, yet alone a mate. He never realized how lonely he felt even being surrounded by so many cats. His amber eyes darkened with sadness.

"We're almost at camp," hissed Sharpfang through the night sky.

"It's awesome," Squirrelpaw told Gold. "There's so many cats. And at

night, the moon always bathes over our Clan since the sky above our camp is clear of trees."

Thorn sighed. "I miss the mountain and Bells," he mewed. "She must be so lonely."

"I'm sure my mother is fine," Red said. "Besides, she wished for our departure. Bells always gives us the right advice."

Icetail nodded. He wondered what kind of cat Bells was to StarClan. Was she a medicine cat once a long time ago? Had she ever been a warrior?

He sighed and shook away the thought. Moon nudged him. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

The camp entrance was right up ahead. He sped up and ducked through it with the entire patrol of cats following behind. He stood still in his spot when he emerged inside the clearing, expecting everyone to be asleep, but he immediately saw every single Clan cat awake, surrounding each other in feasts of prey.

Brightstar worriedly looked at him. "Icetail!" she gasped. "There you are!"

Sparrowheart and Vinetail, who was right beside their leader looked up as well. Sparrowheart's worried eyes suddenly clouded with relief.

"Why were you three gone all day?" his father asked, padding up.

"Did that tunnel, perhaps, lead somewhere?" asked Brightstar. Then, her eyes widened once more at the cats who followed him. "And who are they?"

"This matter has to be discussed in your den," Sharpfang said. "As for the cats, I'll leave Icetail to explain it."

Icetail sighed. He'd known all along that the explaining would be dumped on him. He looked around the camp, hearing little chatters

about the newcomers.

"Who are they?" he heard his Clanmates whisper.

"They can't possibly be kittypets!"

"Where did they come from? They smell strange!"

Icetail's gaze on his Clanmates shushed them. "Please be hospitable," he told everyone. "We found these cats during our mission." *There's no way in StarClan that I am going to tell my Clanmates that there was a path to the mountains. Bells obviously doesn't want visitors.*

Immediately, Silverpaw padded up to Gold and Moon. "Hi!" she said. "I'm Silverpaw, Squirrelpaw's sister."

Moon froze stiff, looking shy, but Gold's enthusiastic personality got the best of her. "You're so cute!" she gushed.

Silverpaw's eyes widened. "Huh?"

"Your pelt—it's so silver. And you're so small but so lean. Everyone else, too. Everyone seems so strong!" Gold exclaimed.

Squirrelpaw purred with amusement, and Thorn padded up. "Please excuse my sister," he apologized.

Icetail turned away, realizing that these five cats were in good paws. He was hoping that his talk with Brightstar wouldn't take too long since he wanted to introduce them to the Clan before any cat gets the wrong ideas.

"Let's go," Brightstar said to Icetail. She led him in her den, and sat down at the very back where no cat could hear them.

For the first time since Icetail was still training under Brightstar's instruction, the two were completely alone.

"So, my apprentice," Brightstar said, purring. Icetail instantly recalled those memories. Even though he'd only been a warrior for a few moons, it felt like those times were ages ago. It especially felt like seasons since he trained under Ashtail's mentorship. "Before I

get an idea who is visiting our camp, I'd like to know what you and your patrol discovered."

"Well, it certainly wasn't a good thing," he began with a sigh.

Brightstar leaned in closer as Icetail lowered his voice.

"No cat, and I mean *no* cat is allowed to go down there. It's too dangerous. The hole leads to a tunnel, a tunnel so deep that even Sharpfang and I got lost. Eventually, we reached a tall cave. There were Twolegs, monsters, everything you could imagine down there. The Twolegs are . . . constructing something." He paused. "Yes, I think it was construction. Like I mentioned, there were monsters and tree-eaters and a lot of angry Twolegs. It wasn't good. Sharpfang, Squirrelpaw and I patched up the hole that led into our territory so it wouldn't affect us anymore. But I am suggesting that the outer hole should be patched too. I don't want any cats accidently running into that mess."

His leader nodded slowly, taking it all in. "I understand. That isn't a good thing. I will tell Sparrowheart to send a third patrol out this dawn to get the job done."

"Good."

"And what about those five newcomers?" Brightstar asked.

Icetail looked outside of the leader's den and spotted them talking and feasting like Clan cats. *I think they are going to fit in just fine,* Icetail thought.

"There was another tunnel. One led to the mountains, Brightstar." He thought about the view that he was sure he'd never see again. "There was a cat up there named Bells. She said that you'd know her."

"Bells?" murmured Brightstar, tilting her head. For a moment, Icetail was scared that she wouldn't remember. Then, his leader's eyes lit up and widened. "Bellflower? She's my kin, my sister!"

Icetail watched as Brightstar stood up. So it's true! His heart warmed up at Brightstar's kit-like excitement.

"I . . . I haven't seen her since we were young! It's been so long. *Too* long. How is she, Icetail?"

He purred. "She is well. Her daughter is here with us along with her mate and three kits. Bells wanted to know if they could stay with MoonClan. She seemed very serious about it, too."

"Bellflower was the medicine cat that trained Vinetail. She'd always had a close bond with StarClan. So close, that I think it even drove her away." Brightstar took a deep breath as she remembered those times. "MoonClan was so different then. She'd be surprised at how the times have changed."

Icetail could understand what Brightstar meant. He used to hear all kinds of tales of how peaceful MoonClan used to be. Things had only gotten harder as DarkClan grew bigger, though. They had constant troubles with MoonClan regarding territory and kin. Those troubles were gone, though, replaced by worse things such as war. Icetail wished that DarkClan was like the other Clans overall.

Brightstar broke Icetail's chain of thought. "I understand. If it is Bells' will, then I don't need to think twice about letting these cats join MoonClan."

Icetail nodded gratefully. "There must be a ceremony, then. The she-cat is called Red, and her mate is Hawk. Their white-furred daughter is Gold, her sister is Moon, and the tom is Thorn."

"I will do it while it's still dark," Brightstar said, exiting the den. Icetail followed her and sat at the base of the rock besides his father. Sparrowheart purred and meowed his greeting. But then, Brightstar leaped to the top of the Moonrock and looked down. "All cats of MoonClan, gather here!" she called, her voice high above the chatter.

Every cat looked up, already gathered.

"We have five newcomers joining MoonClan tonight. I am sure you have met them. Red and Hawk, come forth!"

Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

Gold trembled with the excitement of a kit about to become an apprentice, not noticing the comments of the Clan. Red and Hawk padded up in the middle of the crowd together and looked up at Brightstar. The leader nodded down with approval.

Brightstar began. "Red, I . . . am proud to have you and your kin joining this Clan tonight. Your mother was a very honorable cat, and so I am sure your skills and contributions to MoonClan will not be in vain. I have decided to call you Redsky in honor of where you come from." *She had always lived close to the sky,* realized Icetail. "Living under the stars like us is something you should be proud of. StarClan will watch over you as you journey into the world of becoming a warrior."

She leaped down the Moonrock, and murmured something in her ear. Redsky nodded, and Brightstar lied her head on Redsky's, while Redsky gave a respectful lick to her neck.

The Clan instantly chanted her name. "Redsky! Redsky!"

Some cats are not chanting.

Brightstar had given the name Hawktalon to Redsky's mate, and went on to naming the kits. "Now Moon," the leader said. "You are young, but old enough to be an apprentice. Dawnstripe is worthy of having an apprentice after long, hard training. She is a good hunter, a loyal cat and she has a strong heart. You are worthy of being her apprentice. I will now name you Shiningpaw, in respect to MoonClan's name."

Icetail froze with fear when he remembered that she went out. What if she wasn't here to recieve her first apprentice? But much to his surprise, the warrior stepped up from the crowd of cats. He thought that Dewfang and Dawnstripe would take longer, unless . . . did Dewfang reject her?

Dawnstripe's eyes looked sad, after all. *He did reject her! But why? She's a good cat!*

As Icetail kept thinking, Brightstar named Goldpaw, and apprenticed her to Swiftbreeze. Thornpaw was apprenticed to

Crowflight. "I gave this ceremony under the moon's bright light, so MoonClan's ancestors may watch over these cats in hopes of helping them to be full Clan cats!" Brightstar announced.

Most cats cheered.

He watched as his Clan bathed in the moonlight and greeted the newcomers with interest and excitement.

Icetail glanced up at the mountain's shadowy form, wondering if Bells was watching them.

Chapter Twenty Seven

Edited ✔

Icetail thrashed to break free from the vines that his paws were tangled in. *Help! Let me out!* he wanted to yowl, but the words somehow didn't come out.

Then, a familiar cat padded out from the undergrowth. Icetail gasped. Shard! "Long time no see," meowed the strange cat. Today, he looked much different than the one time where he tried to kill him, and the other time where he insulted him, and the *other* time when he tried to train him.

Finally, Icetail managed out the words. "Sh-Shard!" he gasped, sputtering out blood. Thorns of the vines were digging into the back of his neck painfully. "Help, get me out of here!"

Shard purred. He began to pad away into the distance, leaving Icetail wide-eyed. *He---he just came to see me! He just wanted to tease me*! he thought with anger.

Suddenly, his anger was gone. Other cats were padding out from the distance other than Shard. He made out cats that he hadn't seen for a long time. Icetail stopped struggling and stared straight at his own mother, his eyes wide, his pelt quivering. Ripplefur was also there. They were both staring back at him, expressionless.

"Featherbreeze!" called Icetail. "Featherbreeze! Ripplefur! Snap out of it!"

Featherbreeze and Ripplefur began to pad away after Shard in the darkness.

"No, don't follow him! You don't know what he is going to do to you! Please!" wailed Icetail. He hadn't felt such grief in a long time. He had never felt like a kit again until now ever since the day he had the nightmare of the darkness.

The painfully sharp thorns dug deeper into his pelt, and Icetail yowled with pain as the blood trickled down.

More cats, one by one, began to follow. Ashtail, Dewfang, Flameheart, Brightstar, Vinetail, Squirrelpaw, Silverpaw . . . they were all following each other into the darkness one by one, ignoring Icetail's pleads. Why won't they listen to him?!

Every cat he cared about . . . they are all leaving as if they were dying . . . and he could do nothing but yowl after them as they faded away.

It's a warning. If I do not find the meaning of the prophecy very soon, then every cat I love will die under my paws , because I won't be able to do anything to save them !

* * *

Icetail cleared the elder's bedding as he helped the apprentices with their chores. Sparrowheart refused to put Icetail on any patrols, so this is what he was stuck doing for the day. He certainly did not want to sleep—which everyone kept suggesting that he'd do. He wanted to feel useful to the Clan even though others wanted him to take a break.

Vinetail was the only cat right now who understood. He understood somehow that Icetail would get nightmares if he were to dream. He was thankful for having such a considerate medicine cat.

Stripeeyes padded up, feeling his way to the den. "Oh, hi Icetail. Back to apprentice duties?" meowed the almost-blind tom as he caught Icetail's scent.

"No. I just wanted to help the apprentices," Icetail explained. "Besides, Sparrowheart won't put me on a patrol."

"I can't believe that you don't notice how much you are overworking yourself," laughed Stripeeyes. "Even me, a cat who can't see, can see that."

"That doesn't take sense," Icetail muttered, bundling up Stripeeyes's old bedding. He turned to Silverpaw and Droppaw. "You two! Go

bury this outside the camp," he ordered.

"Yes Icetail!" Silverpaw meowed. She and Droppaw scurried off after scooping it off the ground

"I'll be right back, I need to get you clean bedding," Icetail told the elder. He just nodded and sat down on the outside of his den, enjoying the warmth of the sun.

Icetail padded into Vinetail's den to see Sweetpaw organizing herbs. "Come for bedding?" the medicine cat apprentice asked. "I see you helping the apprentices. I don't think Brightstar wants you to do that."

"Well," said Icetail with a sigh, "It's better than nothing."

"Don't spoil them too much," Sweetpaw meowed, passing him the bedding through her jaws. Icetail clamped on it and padded out, adding a muffled 'thank you' before returning to Stripeeyes.

He laid out the bedding, removing a loose thorn from it before smoothening it out. "There, all done!" Icetail said to Stripeeyes. "You can rest on it now if you'd like."

"Sure thing," Stripeeyes meowed gratefully, not budging from his spot. "Well, I actually prefer it out here. You see, I don't know when I'll die, so I want to enjoy the sun as much as I can."

"That's a sad reason, but I understand." Stripeeyes was the oldest cat in camp, and it wouldn't be a surprise if he'd passed to StarClan in his sleep.

"Want to hear a story?" asked Stripeeyes. "I don't recall ever story-telling to you or your brother. All of the young cats of MoonClan came to me in the past for stories. Even Sharpfang!"

Icetail realized that Stripeeyes was right. As kits, the two would always play and compete with one another. When they were apprentices, nothing much changed except for always having something to do such as patrols or duties. "Dewfang is out on a patrol right now, but I'll listen if you want me to," Icetail replied, sitting next to the elder. *I don't like stories, but I don't want to*

disappoint Stripeeyes.

"Well, the story I am about to tell you is not mine to begin with. It belonged to another elder who died while I was a kit. It's a story about DarkClan." Stripeeyes got more comfortable. "She said that in her early memories, DarkClan had never existed."

"Never *existed*?" Icetail asked, astonished.

"Sure, I guess. That's what Berrysplash said. She told me that she remembered a lot of fights over territories with a bunch of rogues, but of course, it was nothing *she* could fight as a kit. She said that it involved all the Clans, actually. MoonClan was almost at the brink of destruction until the four Clans gave up chunks of their territory to the rogues who now call themselves DarkClan."

Icetail listened closely. Somehow . . . somehow, he *knew* that it connected with the prophecy. Then suddenly, he gasped as realization hit him hard in the head.

The darkness was never meant to be, he recalled. *DarkClan! That darkness—shay if it's DarkClan!*

"Are you okay?" asked Stripeeyes, tilting his head. "You feel tense."

"Oh, I'm fine." *Far from fine*. "I just have to find Flameheart. Do you know where he is?" asked Icetail.

"Yes, he went to go hunt by the borders of CloudClan. Or maybe it was MarshClan . . ."

"Thanks! I'll just follow his scent!" Icetail bolted from his spot, but Stripeeyes stopped him.

"Can't it wait until he gets back?" Stripeeyes meowed firmly. "Sparrowheart said you needed rest today, and you do," warned the old elder.

"It *can't* wait! I don't know when—" he stopped himself there. *I don't know when the darkness is going to strike,* he was about to say. "I-I have to go."

Stripeeyes sighed. "Good luck."

"Good luck for what?" asked Icetail.

"I don't know what to wish you luck for, but you obviously need it," meowed Stripeeyes with a smirk as he padded into his den.

Stripeeyes was not right. The prophecy can't be figured out by luck, so far it hasn't. *But thanks anyways, Stripeeyes*, Icetail thought before bolting out of the camp entrance.

Now I know something helpful!

Chapter Twenty Eight

Edited ✔

Guess what :3 so, when I started this book, it was FEBRUARY. Now I'm already at chapter twenty eight when I thought that it would take much much longer to get here. Thanks to all of you who read along as I update!!! ^_^

Icetail easily followed Flameheart's scent towards CloudClan.

From a distance, he spotted his friend crouched low to the ground, stalking a rabbit by where the border marker was supposed to be. The rabbit hopped a few paces towards Flameheart, and the ginger tom leaped, unnoticed, giving it a killing blow to the neck.

"Got it!" exclaimed Flameheart eagerly.

Icetail padded out from the undergrowth. "A fine catch," he praised. "And a rabbit too! The Clan will be pleased."

Flameheart purred. "Thanks. What are you doing all the way out here? I thought Sparrowheart told you to rest."

"I came to talk to you."

Flameheart took the rabbit in between his jaws, and mumbled, "Right. Let's talk at camp. The hunting patrol is almost finished."

"No, we can't go back right now. I have to talk to you about the prophecy," meowed Icetail. And at that, Flameheart froze and looked up.

"The prophecy?" he asked with surprise.

"That's right . . ." Icetail said with a sigh. "Back at camp I heard an old elder's tail The story took place a long time ago, about the destruction of the Clans. That's when DarkClan came into making."

"Came in to making?" Flameheart asked again.

"Yes, that's what's so important! Stripeeyes said that this was a true story. The point is, DarkClan is not a real Clan. And the prophecy says it too, *the darkness was never meant to be*!"

Flameheart nodded. "I understand your point . . ."

"I think it's warning us about war, Flameheart."

"We are already at war," meowed Flameheart. "It's MoonClan's war."

"Exactly," said Icetail. "And soon enough, the other Clans might get called in this war, too. Or at least that's what I think. And the two cats in the prophecy, the one who will lead and the one who will destroy, might play a big role on whether or not we'll win."

"If that's the case, then finding out should be our priority."

"You're right," Icetail replied. "So that's why I need to talk to StarClan. I need to find that underground pool again!"

* * *

Icetail and Flameheart walked side-by-side back in the direction of the camp. Suddenly, a rustle in the bushes was heard, and Icetail froze. Flameheart's gaze shot at Icetail, curious, though he didn't say a word.

In the distance, Icetail spotted Vinetail padding through the forest, herbs in his mouth. Icetail breathed a sigh of relief. *It's only the medicine cat* . . . he thought. But then, another cat leaped out of the undergrowth. His pelt was muddied and his eyes blazed.

The cat leaped onto Vinetail's back, pinning him down. Vinetail gasped and tried to push the cat off, but already, his teeth sunk into Vinetail's neck.

"Vinetail!" Icetail shrieked, dashing over. The attacker looked up and saw the Clan cats, then dashed. Icetail leaped over a few twigs, and reached the medicine cat. Flameheart followed him. "Flameheart, take Vinetail back to camp!" he ordered before chasing

after the attacker.

Flameheart obeyed, knowing that this was no time to argue, and helped the medicine cat on his paws. Icetail pelted through the bushes.

This is the same as before! he thought with a rush of adrenaline. *This is the cat who attacked Grayfur! Unforgivable, attacking defenseless cats like this!*

"Come back here and fight me like a warrior!" Icetail yowled through the forest.

The cat didn't stop running. He only sped up his pace, disappearing into the undergrowth. Icetail sped up too, determined to catch this despicable cat. A line of bushes blocked his path up ahead and he pushed off his hind legs, leaping into the air and over it with the grace of a MoonClan warrior. He was expecting to see the attacker just beyond the bush, but was surprised when he saw nothing but a large rock. Icetail couldn't react in time to the obstacle and immediately, his head collided with the rock, causing his body to crash right into a pool of mud.

The last thing he saw was Silverpaw and Grayfur before he fell unconscious.

* * *

Icetail's eyes shot open as he gasped for air, leaping straight to his paws. Silverpaw stared at him with surprise, eyes wide. She must have been cleaning the mud from his pelt.

"Wh-what happened?" he managed, trying to recall the events prior to falling asleep. His head ached and he felt a rush of energy pooling up his spine. *That's right, someone attached Vinetail!*

The apprentice looked grim. "You were chasing the cat who murdered Vinetail, and you hit your head—"

"The cat who *murdered* Vinetail?!" Icetail cut her off. "You mean he's *dead*?" He was about to yell, but Silverpaw stopped him by digging her face in his pelt. Surprised, Icetail looked down to her starry

silver pelt.

"He-he's dead . . ." she repeated. "And the attacker got away with it."

Icetail calmed down, but grief overcame his heart. Sparrowheart padded inside the den, followed by the shy apprentice, Droppaw, and Flameheart. "What did I tell you about leaving camp?" demanded Sparrowheart. "For days and days, you work hard non-stop, and now you almost got yourself killed!"

"I wasn't about to get *myself* killed. I was about to catch the cat who hurt my Clanmate! And I would have got him, too!" he snapped, turning to face his father with a look of defiance in his eyes.

"If it weren't for Icetail, we wouldn't of been able to even see what got Vinetail," Flameheart said in Icetail's defense.

Brightstar also padded into the den. Her eyes were dull and clouded with grief, and her fur was messy as if it were unkept for days. "Icetail . . . did you see what this cat looked like?" she asked.

Icetail thought long and hard. "I thought I saw blue eyes. Mud covered his pelt, so I didn't catch his scent or see what his pelt looked like. But I'm sure if I saw him again, I'd recognize him." He abruptly stood up. "Let me out on a patrol, Brightstar. *Please*. I need to find this cat."

"No, you're exhausted," Sparrowheart objected. "I should have Sweetpaw check on you."

"Don't let Sweetpaw check on me. She's probably in shock," Icetail snapped. He thought of the medicine cat's apprentice and how close to finishing her training she was. She especially had a close bond with her mentor, having spent every day of her apprenticeship with him. His heart began to ache for the poor she-cat. After all, he knew what it felt like to lose your mentor.

Droppaw stepped up. "I can bring you extra moss and a piece of prey, Icetail," she offered. "Your father is right. You should rest up your energy."

"I don't want to rest," murmured Icetail, saddened by his thoughts.

"Let me see Vinetail."

They moved out of the way, revealing the congested entrance to the medicine den. He padded outside to see that the sky was dark. The moon was up. How long had he been unconscious? He saw Vinetail's body under the moonlight. He looked as handsome as Featherbreeze was on the day of her vigil. Icetail collapsed by the medicine cat's body and pressed his nose to Vinetail's cold fur.

"I'm sorry," whispered Icetail. "This is my fault. If only I had been quicker."

A new presence came up from behind Icetail. "It isn't your fault," a soft voice said. He turned to see Sweetpaw. "You did everything you could, Icetail. Don't beat yourself up over this. You have too many things on your mind already."

"How do you . . ."

"Vinetail told me everything," she whispered, staring down at her dead mentor. Icetail understood. She must've known about the prophecy, then. "He was going to name me a full medicine cat this quarter moon. Now I don't know how I will be a medicine cat anymore without having a proper naming ceremony. I'm useless without Vinetail." Her voice cracked at her last words.

"You shouldn't beat yourself up over this either," meowed Icetail quietly. "Perhaps the other medicine cats will name you."

She nodded. "That's what's supposed to happen. But I wanted Vinetail to do it."

Icetail sighed. *Life is tough. We all learn it the hard way,* he would of said, but he didn't. This was no time to be saying sad and insensitive things like that. He payed his last respect to the medicine cat and said goodnight to Sweetpaw before clambered to the warrior's den, head thumping madly.

Icetail didn't want to talk to anybody anymore.

He crawled into his nest and got comfortable, keeping his gaze on Vinetail's limp body. Cats silently grieved around him, heads bent

down and eyes closed tightly. The loss of a medicine cat was probably the hardest loss of all.

As Icetail slowly drifted to sleep, he saw Dewfang pad into the camp with his patrol. All cats with him immediately rushed over to the dead body, questions being raised and words of grief and comfort being shared. Dewfang stared from afar, his gaze watching the medicine cat's body coldly.

And at that, Icetail fell into sleep.

For the second time this quarter moon, he dreamt. He found himself in a clearing of a Clan. Upon the leader's den was his brother, proudly basking in the sunlight as the Clan chanted his name.

"Dewstar! Dewstar! Dewstar!"

Realization hit Icetail hard in the head. This is also part of the prophecy. His dream . . . it was telling him his long awaited answer. Icetail was not the cat who would lead. He was the cat who would destroy. And Dewfang was the second cat of the prophecy. The true leader.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Edited ✔

A moon later, Icetail felt like he was slowing down. Sparrowheart was right. He was becoming exhausted.

Sweetpaw received her medicine cat name just as Icetail told her she would. The other medicine cats decided a name for her—Sweetheart—but she was dissatisfied because she preferred Vinetail to name her.

As for everyone else, adjustment wasn't easy but it did come with time. The kits in the Clan were going to soon be apprentices, which was a reason for excitement amongst the warriors. Shiningpaw, Goldpaw and Thornpaw seemed to be adjusting well into MoonClan along with their parents, and turned out to be reasonable assets due to their mountain-hunting skills and sharp senses that helped them fit in easily with the Clan.

Icetail couldn't help but wonder if he would soon be a mentor. *I might destroy the stupid Clans before that ever happens,* he thought bitterly, keeping to his nest.

Dewfang entered into the camp, surrounded by a crowd of cats. Icetail sighed and tucked his nose under his tail, watching as his brother basked in the popularity of the Clan. No wonder Dewfang was going to be a leader. Everyone always seemed to like him! The only cats that weren't surrounding him were the senior warriors, sticking to their nests or sharing tongues with their mates. He wondered if they were going through personal problems, too.

Ashtail padded over to Icetail. "Hi," he meowed. "Why are you alone? All the young warriors seem to be enjoying themselves with your brother." He paused, before cautiously continuing to speak. "Are you jealous?"

Icetail's pelt burned with embarrassment as he shook his head. "Of

course I'm not. I just hate crowds."

"Alright," Ashtail purred. "Want to come eat with Brightstar and the other senior warriors?"

Icetail nodded. "Sure. It's better than being alone. I-I mean, eating something all on my own would be a waste . . ." He didn't want to admit to his former mentor that he didn't want to be alone due to Ashtail's sharp senses. He would easily be able to tell that Icetail was lying about being jealous, it was too embarrassing.

Ashtail kept purring. "Alright. Come with us. We were expecting you'd want to come since you seemed—"

"Don't say it," Icetail cut off with a sigh. Ashtail humorously rolled their eyes. They began to pad to the group of senior warriors, but Icetail heard two voices within his earshot.

"Why isn't he with Dewfang and the other apprentices and warriors?" whispered a voice he recognized. It was Droppaw. He almost laughed. Those apprentices were loud.

"Are you kidding? I'd die to eat with Brightstar! It's an honor eating with the senior warriors, or at least I think so," Silverpaw explained. Ever since Droppaw joined the Clan, the two have been best friends.

Ashtail turned to them as he passed. "You two. Care to join us?"

Silverpaw nodded eagerly. "Come on, Droppaw! It'll be awesome!"

Droppaw looked up to Icetail, her eyes shy. Icetail sighed to himself. *I don't get apprentice she-cats. If she likes me, why doesn't she try to be my friend?* he thought. The fact that he acted shyly only made things weirder.

"I'll come," she decided. She looked over her shoulder to Dewfang's group as he talked about the epic hunting patrol that he was just on. Icetail sighed and wondered how he could hold such easy conversation.

He sat down right between Brightstar and Sparrowheart, feeling comfortable with the company of cats he grew up around.

Sparrowheart leaned in close to Icetail, gulping down a piece of shrew before speaking. "I have an important question to ask you."

Icetail raised his brow. "What could that be?"

"When'll you and your brother finally get mates?" he asked, making Icetail jump. "I mean, I'm getting pretty old and battle is rough. I want to see my sons' kits before I die."

"D-don't talk like that," Icetail stammered, feeling heat of embarrassment rise to his head. "Besides, you sound like a she-cat."

Sparrowheart purred. "You'll feel the same way when you're in my position." He looked up to the sky for a moment, making Icetail wonder what *else* his father was thinking about. He was a little startled when Silverpaw pushed forward to him a piece of prey.

"You're not eating anything," she mewed. "Want to share?"

Icetail looked down and saw a plump vole. "Sure," he decided. He took the first bite, savoring the warmth and the blood of the creature before letting Silverpaw take the next bite. The process went on until the vole was completely devoured. "That was good," he said with a sigh.

She nodded in agreement. "Hey, besides that," she went on, scanning the camp, "where's Softpelt?"

Icetail shrugged. "She was on the last hunting patrol . . . why?" he asked.

"That hunting patrol returned," Silverpaw pointed out. "But Softpelt isn't here. Can't you tell?" The apprentice's blue eyes were large with worry.

Immediately, Icetail shot up from his spot. There was a murderer out there. Softpelt could be anywhere right now, dead or alive! Brightstar stared at him questioning my as he burst right through the crowd of cats, pelting as fast as he could to the outside world.

"Icetail!" Dawnstripe yowled, seeing him dash through the camp entrance.

He noticed some cats following him, but he didn't stop. *Where did the patrol go? MarshClan*? he quickly recalled, changing his direction. He picked up his Clanmate's scent, and began following as he ran. His heart almost stopped as he scented something unpleasant.

It was the smell of death.

Fear filled his entire body as he quickly searched the undergrowth, poking through weeds and bushes before falling out his Clanmate's name. "Softpelt! Answer me, Softpelt!"

He stumbled over a tree root and quickly scrambled to his paws to check a patch of overgrown grass where the scent smelled the strongest. Then, he came to a halt, and so did his heartbeat. Right in front of him lay Softpelt's dead body, half hidden by the grass. Beside him, Silverpaw, Sparrowheart and Dawnstripe had stopped in their tracks, almost crashing into each other as they realized what was going on. Their eyes widened with shock.

"Wh-who . . ." Dawnstripe began to murmur.

"How did you know?" Silverpaw whispered. "I-I thought she was just late . . . I didn't think—"

"It's that murderer again!" growled Sparrowheart. "He won't stop striking!" His eyes were hurt for a second. "Another Clanmate lost . . ." Icetail's father sadly looked down to Softpelt's body.

Icetail buried his nose in her fur. "I hope you find your place in the stars," he whispered gravely. "We will avenge you and Vinetail. We will find that murderer without fail!"

* * *

Sparrowheart stares down to the Clan right besides Brightstar on top of the Moonrock. "Icetail," he began. "You lead a patrol down CloudClan, and pick a few good warriors to take with you. Adderclaw, you take a patrol and lead it down to MarshClan to investigate if there are any clues as to what is happening. Keep an eye out for anyone suspicious."

"Should we have a patrol going down to DarkClan?" asked Fireshade, padding up to the Moonrock to sit at the base. "It could be a DarkClan warrior for all we know."

Murmurs of agreement rippled through the crowd.

"Fine, you take a couple cats down there as well. Make sure our boundary scents are strong, and that there are no DarkClan cats in our territory," Sparrowheart decided. "Do not engage in *any* battle whatsoever. If you find anyone suspicious enough, bring them back to camp alive!"

"Will do!" Fireshade meowed, already choosing cats to go with him.

"Last, Shadowheart," Brightstar said, cutting off whatever Sparrowheart was about to conclude. "Take two warriors down to StreamClan. We don't know where the murderer came from. Though DarkClan is a high suspect on the list, it could have come from any of the Clans."

Icetail's gaze traveled over to Shadowheart. He still had never spoken to the black-furred warrior properly ever since that dreadful day Featherbreeze died. But there was no need to, anyways. Shadowheart wasn't a cat Icetail wants to be friendly with, as immaturely as it seemed.

"That concludes the patrols," Sparrowheart said, "and now the regular duties . . ."

Icetail stopped listening from there. He began to look around to see who he wanted to take on the investigation. Immediately, Ashtail and Rainwhisker were in view. He padded up to his former mentor and his old friend. "Do you two want to come with me?"

"Sure," Ashtail said, and at the same time, Rainwhisker meowed, "I'd love to."

Icetail nodded. "Great." He looked around. *Who else should I take?* he thought. He immediately spotted Sharpfang. *Him and I aren't great friends, but I don't think we're enemies either.* He remembered what Sparrowheart said about Sharpfang being a good claw to a paw. *It*

wouldn't hurt to ask.

"Sharpfang!" Icetail called. "Do you want to go on my patrol?"

Sharpfang's cool gaze met Icetail's amber eyes. "Sure, whatever," he said, padding up besides Rainwhisker and Ashtail. That was much easier than he thought. Sagepelt approached the group and touched her nose to Sharpfang's.

"See you soon," she murmured to him. He nodded, flicking his tail over her spine to say goodbye. Icetail would never stop wondering how a cat like Sharpfang managed to get a she-cat like Sagepelt.

"Should I take anyone else?" Icetail asked.

"Can we come?" Grayfur asked, padding up with Silverpaw besides her.

He nodded. "That's fine. I think the patrol is good enough," he decided. "We should get moving."

Icetail led his group of cats outside the entrance of the camp and into the green forest. Icetail looked around instantly, eyes, nose and ears sharp. He couldn't let his guard down just because he was so deep within MoonClan's safe territory.

It's not so safe anymore, he thought with unease. *The murderer has been close to camp. I don't know what to expect.*

Silverpaw padded right besides Icetail and rest her tail on his back, causing him to jump with surprise. "You should relax," she said softly.

"Not until I know MoonClan is safe," he responded with a growl. "I can't let anyone else die."

"You're resting this whole big burden on yourself," Silverpaw murmured. "That's why you're always so tense and . . . and sad."

"I'm not—" Icetail began, but Silverpaw cut him off.

"You keep everything—all these responsibilities and feelings—

bundled up inside you with no cat to share it to," Silverpaw went on, her voice getting a little angry. "It's as if you don't realize that there is a whole Clan of cats all around you that want to listen and share your fears! We're all scared too, Icetail. But we're a Clan so that we can watch each other's backs and make sure we're okay. That includes you too."

Icetail remained silent.

"You should start relying on us more," she growled, "I feel like you don't trust us."

"Of course I trust the Clan!" Icetail protested.

Silverpaw padded up ahead, now frustrated. Icetail sighed. *What's she trying to do? Comfort me or make me feel bad?* he grumbled in his mind.

Suddenly, he heard the trees rustle. He looked up at the branches, realizing that they are loose. Right above Silverpaw, a thick, old branch of a large oak tree snapped right off the tree.

"Watch out!" called Icetail, leaping ahead of her and shoved her out of the way.

Silverpaw gasped, and the large branch hit the ground hard, crashing and splitting into smaller pieces all over the forest floor with a loud *snap!* "Oh my StarClan," she murmured.

Icetail got off of her. "If you're going to be mad, don't get yourself killed," he snapped.

Grayfur ran up to Silverpaw. "Are you two okay?" she exclaimed. "I saw that—you could've gotten crushed to death!"

"We're okay," reassured Icetail.

"Thank StarClan," Grayfur sighed of relief. "Come on, Silverpaw. Stick close to me."

Ashtail looked around, his ears pricked. "We'd better hurry," he meowed. "The branches might start falling again. Any one of us can

get crushed."

"You're right," Grayfur said.

"Move out!" Icetail called. Sharpfang took the lead, and Icetail looked right at Silverpaw, whose eyes were still on the remains of the branch. "Let's go. We have a patrol to do."

Her eyes snapped from the branch to Icetail. Then, she looked to her paws. "Thanks," she mewed, "for saving me. And . . . sorry for snapping at you like that."

Icetail shrugged, not wanting to be thanked. "You were right," he said with a low voice. "I was shutting out everyone around me. Ever since Featherbreeze was murdered, I felt alone. And ever since Dewfang stopped hanging out with me—"

Silverpaw shuddered at the mention of his name.

"What?" Icetail asked her.

"Dewfang," she responded. "He never stops staring at me. He said something about waiting for me to become a warrior or something like that. I felt a little bit creeped."

Icetail looked down. *He wants her as a mate when she's older,* he thought. "He's . . . probably excited for you to become a warrior."

"That's not how I viewed it," she mumbled.

"Let's catch up to everyone else," Icetail meowed. "We have to get back on track."

Deep inside, his chest began to feel hot. *Now he wants to take away my friends! Not if I can help it. He's not going to take something else from me,* Icetail thought angrily.

Chapter Thirty

Edited ✔

As soon as Icetail got back to camp from his patrol, he padded angrily over to Dewfang, his ears drawn back and his tail lashing.

"Oh, hi," purred his brother with a smirk on his face.

"Don't *hi* me," growled Icetail. "Do you mean to me that you're planning on taking *Silverpaw* as a mate?" Even though he was having an outburst, he kept his voice low enough so nobody could hear him.

"How'd you hear that?" Dewfang asked, not looking surprised.

"She told me what you were doing," Icetail responded. "She doesn't feel comfortable."

Dewfang lied down in his nest and shrugged. "Whatever," he said. "Anyways, move. You're in my sun." His white fur was as briliant as it was on their apprentice ceremony. His eyes glinted of something that Icetail couldn't understand.

Icetail's eyes narrowed. *I can't believe StarClan chose* Dewfang *to lead. I would've made a better leader than this mouse-heart! Where is that innocent cat who saved Silverkit and Squirrelkit with me from DarkClan? Why is he like this?*

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" Brightstar called, dismissing Icetail's thoughts.

"Let's go. Brightstar's summoning us," Icetail muttered, stalking to the clearing. Dewfang shrugged and padded to the center of the camp. Icetail remained in the back, taking a spot besides Volefur and Dawnstripe.

When Brightstar saw that most of the cats of MoonClan gathered,

she began. "Tonight, there will be a full moon, so there will be a gathering," she began. "I've thought about it all day . . . and I've decided the elders will remain in camp for Softpelt's burial. Her vigil was long and her soul will be blessed by the full moon tonight. She has found her place with StarClan." Brightstar stopped speaking and closed her eyes for a moment. The Clan remained in grim silence before she opened her eyes once more. Her expression was unreadable to Icetail. "Before everyone goes tonight, they must pay their respects to our fallen warrior."

Icetail glanced around. Petalwing, Softpelt's littermate, sat alone in the crowd, her eyes sadly watching her paws.

"Those who will come to tonight's gathering will be Sagepelt, Graywing, Silverpaw, Bluewing, Squirrelpaw, Dawnstripe, Voleheart, Rainwhisker, Icetail, Dewfang, Crowflight, Redsky, Hawktalon and Sweetheart. While I am gone, Sharpfang will be in charge. This concludes today's Clan meeting," Brightstar meowed, leaping off her den.

She padded over to Softpelt, ears drawn back and shoulders hunched low in grief and silent defeat.

* * *

Icetail kept to the front of the group as they traveled through the territories to the gathering place. Everybody remained silent, their thoughts likely on Softpelt and the murderer that was likely roaming the forest. When they arrived at the gathering place, the clearing was already filled with all the Clan cats, indicating that MoonClan was the last to arrive. Icetail took his spot besides Silverpaw, glaring at Dewfang, who didn't seem to notice.

"I suppose everyone is here now, so let the gathering begin!" Sandstar called.

All cats grew silent. Icetail took his gaze of his brother and stared up at the crazed DarkClan leader. Her fur was more shaggy than it was last moon, and she had more scars than ever before coating her pelt. She didn't look like she usually did. Something about her was off . . .

"I will start," Swiftstar meowed angrily. "I want to start off by mentioning something that everyone should be aware of."

Brightstar raised her brow. "And what is that?" she asked.

Swiftstar's eyes looked pained. "There's a murderer roaming our territory. Either a Clan cat or a rogue, we do not know. What we do know is, that cat is among us in our territories!"

Icetail's eyes widened. "There's a murderer in our territory, too!" he called.

So he hasn't been targeting just MoonClan? he thought with surprise. The thought of that wasn't comforting. After all, who knows what kind of cat this murderer could be?

"Us too," meowed Berryheart, MarshClan's deputy. "There have been several attempts on our cats, but thankfully he was never successful."

Brightstar clawed the rock she was on. "There was a failed attempt long ago . . . but a moon ago, Vinetail died. And today." The MoonClan leader stopped talking for a moment to contain the sadness, and began again. "Softpelt was victimized, too. We lost two of our dear Clanmates this last moon."

Swiftstar rested his tail on Brightstar's shoulder to comfort her. "It is upsetting that your medicine cat is gone. I heard from Echoleaf of what happened. And I am sorry about your warrior, Brightstar." She dipped her head to him, grateful for his respect. "As for my Clan, we have a new queen in the nursery—Heartsky. But sadly, we lost a very dear apprentice in death. Our dear Lightpaw was taken by that murderer."

Most of the CloudClan cats became silent. Brightstar hissed loud enough for those close enough to hear. "How can we just let this murderer get away with this? Why is it that we can't defend against one *single* cat?"

Her frustration wasn't lone. Nearly every cat in the gathering muttered their agreements, except for the cats of DarkClan. Icetail

should have known that none of their cats were targeted. After all, they were a big suspect.

"We will catch that murderer at all costs," Swiftstar said in agreement. "We won't let him escape us!"

Brightstar nodded. "We must make sure of it. *All* of us."

After a few moments of silence, Lakestar stood up. "I'll speak next," he mewed. Everyone looked up to StreamClan's leader as he waited for the murmuring cats to silence down. Finally, he began. "We have been receiving well prey from the river and new kits in the nursery. Luckily, none of our cats have seen a rogue murderer in our territory. I am sorry for the losses of the other Clans."

Icetail could feel some cats tense. "*Or* someone in StreamClan is responsible for the murderer!" growled a CloudClan warrior. Icetail looked at the warrior, eyes wide. *Are they so scared that they will start making up answers?* he thought with disbelief. "Of course it makes sense that none of your warrior's were a victim!"

"How dare you put the blame on StreamClan!" snapped one of their warriors back. Back and forth, the two Clans began to argue.

"Nobody's going to be blamed!" Stonestar yowled through the outbreak of the CloudClan and StreamClan cats. "We don't know for sure of the facts."

"I agree," mewed his medicine cat.

Lakestar's eyes were angry. "As I was saying," he meowed, "I think this cat is white-furred." Some cats tensed. "My Clanmates have reported a white-furred MoonClan warrior washing mud off his pelt in puddles surrounding our rivers. I'm not sure if this helps, but . . ."

"Dewfang!" Icetail gasped, looking at his brother. *He's the only cat who is not shocked from these deaths!* he recalled. *And one of the only white-furred warriors in MoonClan. Please, StarClan, don't let it be my brother.*

Dewfang smirked and Icetail's heart stopped. "I can't believe you stupid cats are finally putting two and two together."

Icetail's fur bristled. "I knew you were up to something," he growled to his brother, slowly standing up. Everybody was silent, watching as the scene unfolded. He stood up taller, and he could see their father, Sparrowheart, frozen shocked by the base of the leader's rock.

"So it's true?" Brightstar growled, leaping down to the forest ground. She padded up slowly. "Dewfang, answer me now. *Is it true*?"

"You would have found out sooner or later." The fierce warrior stood, backing away from the crowd of MoonClan cats with a devious look in his eye. CloudClan warriors started to hiss, their fur bristling as they stared at Dewfang.

Brightstar puffed up her fur, unsheathing her claws. "I never thought that it would be *you*! You were always such a good warrior . . . but now I see. It was all an act!"

"Stupid MoonClan cats," laughed Dewfang, backing away. "You all were so obsessed with me. You would have never suspected!"

Swiftstar stood up. "Brightstar! It's against the warrior code to kill. You cannot do this, or else StarClan will disapprove!"

Brightstar froze in place, her paws stuck on the ground at Swiftstar's words. Lakestar nodded with agreement as the other two leaders sat watching in silence. *Was she really going to kill him*? thought Icetail with fear. He began to tremble, Silverpaw pressing closer to him with fear.

"You're banned from MoonClan!" Brightstar finally growled. "If you are ever seen on my territory again, all of my warriors have permission to *kill* you. You have no allies, Dewfang. Leave this place, or you won't live to see another day!"

"The same goes for me," hissed Lakestar. "I'm sure the other leaders will agree. You are no longer welcome here!"

Dewfang's tail lashed eagerly. "I wouldn't want to be welcomed by such weak Clans anyway. Good riddance to all of you!"

"I thought we were brothers!" shouted Icetail, his voice hoarse. "You

betrayed me!"

Their eyes met for a brief second. He couldn't tell what his brother was thinking, but he could only feel the emotions swirling through his own head. His own littermate . . . his brother, gone . . .

Dewfang whirled around and stalked out of the gathering place, not bothering to glance back. Icetail could not believe this was happening. *Sure, I suspected my brother . . . but I never wanted to believe it!*

"Traitor!" some cats from MoonClan yowled.

"I never want to see you again!" growled cats from other Clans.

Icetail stared at the entrance as his brother dissapeared, basking in the comments of hate he was recieving until he was gone.

"I'll make sure he goes!" Rainwhisker meowed.

"I'll go too," said Crowflight.

The two cats went after Dewfang through the entrance.

Brightstar shook her head and squeezed her eyes shut, in as much disbelief as everybody else. Then, she looked up to the leader's rock with fierce and angry eyes. "Sandstar, have you got anything to say?"

Sandstar's green eyes were dull, harboring no emotion. "No," she said simply before leaping of the large rock. She observed MoonClan once more, meeting Icetail's gaze. "DarkClan is dismissed."

* * *

"This is all too much to take in," murmured Nightrose, pacing back and forth. "What if Dewfang comes back? What if he takes one of my kits? And why did Sandstar leave just like that?"

Fireshade padded up to her and shook his head. "I will never let that happen," he growled. Nightrose nodded and licked one of her

kits between the ears, while the other two played happily together. "And DarkClan has always had their mysterious ways."

Icetail kept his eyes on the entrance, wondering if Dewfang will ever walk through it again. He jumped when he saw a cat emerge, but then realized that it was only Crowflight and Rainwhisker.

"What has happened?" Brightstar immediately asked, padding up. Sparrowheart sadly walked over to Icetail and rest his tail on his son's back as their leader spoke. "Did Dewfang leave the territories?"

Rainwhisker nodded. "Yes. We saw him before he left," meowed the warrior, shaking his head. "Dewfang asked us if we wanted to . . . 'join' with him. I don't think he is planning to give up so easily."

"What do you mean by that?" Icetail growled. What could Dewfang possibly be planning?

Crowflight looked up, his eyes glimmering in the moonlight. "It means that Dewfang has reinforcements. He wants to strike back, Brightstar. That's what we think it means."

Chapter Thirty One

Edited ✔

Sweetheart nudged Icetail. "Hey," she mewed to him. He looked at the medicine cat, expecting Vinetail for a brief moment, before making out the former medicine cat apprentice's silhouette.

"Hi, Sweetheart," said Icetail. "Is there something you need?"

Sweetheart shook her head. "Not really. Since it's leaf-fall already, I wanted to go stalk up on supplies . . . but you know that I can't go by myself."

Icetail nodded. "Sure, I'll come." He remembered the time he collected herbs with Vinetail as an apprentice and sighed sadly at the memory. He shook it away. *I can't live in the past . . . I learned my lesson.*

"We have to take one more cat with us, though," Sweetheart meowed. "Should I take an apprentice?" She tilted her head and Icetail shrugged. "I'll be right back," she said.

It's been a a quarter-moon since Dewfang had been exiled from MoonClan, and things for Icetail haven't been the same since. Day by day, Icetail was depressed. He had lost almost everything, all thanks to the darkness. Every single night he would dread what would be the next step for the prophecy, but he never got answers since that night he dreamt of Dewfang being the leader of a Clan.

He would never stop thinking about it, and would always take into consideration to talk to someone just like Silverpaw suggested he'd do, but Icetail couldn't bring himself up for dumping his problems on other cats. He felt that his scars were burning, that his battle wounds were re-opening, and he felt fearful that Dewfang would come out of the shadows to strike. He was scared to go near the borders of DarkClan. Nothing good ever came from that Clan. And worst of all, Icetail was upset about his destiny. *I was destined to*

suffer, he thought bitterly. *Nothing I do will make me better. Everything good I have is just taken away. I can't stand it!*

Even in the midst of a Clan, Icetail felt fully responsible for a lot of things his Clanmates did not know of. He felt responsible to keep them safe, to keep them away from this darkness. He wanted to protect his Clanmates forever, and carry all their burdens so no one else can experience what he was feeling right now. That's why he was so depressed and so alone. Everything he did was a huge bargain.

Sweetheart returned with Silverpaw at her heels, cutting off Icetail's train of thought. "I asked Grayfur if Silverpaw should come with us, and she agreed," meowed the medicine cat. "Let's leave now that the sun is still high."

Icetail sighed and nodded. "Yeah, let's go."

He led them outside the entrance, and began making his way towards where the herb patch was. "You know where it is, right?" Sweetheart asked.

"I do," Icetail responded. "I've been there a few times as an apprentice." He kept on leading them. Icetail's ears pricked as he overheard Silverpaw's and Sweetheart's conversation. For once, Icetail wished that he did not have good senses.

"Is he okay?" Silverpaw whispered to Sweetheart.

"I don't know. He's been like that for such a long time. It reminds me of him when he was an apprentice and his mother was killed in battle," responded Sweetheart.

"I remember that time . . . it's faint, but it's near the time where Ripplefur died, too," Silverpaw responded. "He charged out of camp, and no one knew where he went for a long time, until he came back to camp unconscious. Nobody told me what happened. All the warriors were so secretive."

Icetail looked back to the two of them, causing them to stop their conversation. "What happened that day was the beginning of this

war," he told her. "I was the one who started it."

Silverpaw looked embarrassed that he overhead her, but Sweetheart thought otherwise.

"Nonsense," said the medicine cat sympathetically. "DarkClan has always been like that. None of this has ever been your fault."

Icetail's head snapped back once more, and his eyes felt blurry and wet. "Ever since that day, nothing was right! Everything became worse and worse. The battle started because I killed Fallentail, and MoonClan never found peace because of my existence. It's been like this since I was apprenticed. It'll always be like this!"

"Icetail—"gasped Silverpaw.

Sweetheart's eyes were wide. "What's wrong, Icetail?" she whispered.

Icetail's claws dug the ground. "I can't take this anymore. All I want is my Clanmates to be happy, but nothing good is coming out for me."

"Icetail, stop this!" demanded Sweetheart. "I-I don't understand what you're talking about!"

Icetail looked up at the medicine cat. She had no cures for uncontrollable feelings. She couldn't possibly understand what he was going through right now. There's nothing that's going to stop the way he felt about the past recent events.

"I just want to die," whispered Icetail, his pelt shaking with agony. "I-I . . . I can't stand it anymore. I just want this all to be over with already!"

Sweetheart's eyes widened once more. "Please, don't talk like this, Icetail. Trust me, whatever you're saying is not true. Please, Icetail."

Silverpaw was speechless.

Icetail turned away from them, and pelted through the forest, hoping that they wouldn't follow him. He was engulfed with grief

over his brother, and hatred was filling his heart. *I just want to be alone. If I never show my face in MoonClan again, then every cat will have peace in their lives. I'm sure of it!*

He didn't turn back at all as he disappeared in the forest. This made him feel even worse. He was running away from his problems, and he was being a coward. Nothing good was coming out of his actions, for what's done was done.

* * *

Icetail kept on padding through the forest, his ears alert. MoonClan was a familiar territory to him, but he did not know where he was going. He felt lost, and he felt that he was being watched. He regretted having that outburst in front of Sweetheart, especially in front of Silverpaw. He knew better than to make his Clanmates worry.

What I did was wrong, he thought with guilt. *I'm such an idiot!* Icetail sighed and sat down by a tree, watching the red and yellow leaves slowly descend to the ground. He needed to learn to be smarter. He had to. Nothing good ever came out of his actions.

"I saw that little outburst there," said a voice that Icetail did not recognize. He burst up from his spot. He didn't recognize the voice, but he did recognize the scent. *DarkClan. What are they doing so deep in MoonClan's territory?*

"Show yourself!" growled Icetail.

A cat emerged from the undergrowth. *How have I not scented him, let alone hear him?* thought Icetail with surprise. It must've been because he'd been distracting himself so much with thoights.

"That wasn't smart, what you did back there," the cat went on. Icetail studied his appearance. He was a gray cat, but with lighter fur than Icetail's.

"Whoa are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Graysoul," meowed the DarkClan warrior.

Icetail's claws unsheathed and he stood taller. His fur bristled. "Leave this territory at once," he ordered, "or I will attack you." He inched closer to Graysoul, cautiously. Icetail's ears were drawn back and his tail lashed.

"You should reconsider that," said Graysoul.

"Why should I?"

"Or else that little silver apprentice is going to get a good killing," Graysoul said bluntly. "You didn't think that I'd come here without a plan, did you?"

Icetail froze in his spot. *Kill Silverpaw? He means it!* "Where is she?" demanded Icetail. He knew now that Graysoul wasn't alone. Whoever this other cat is, he was with Silverpaw right now. *I shouldn't have left them!* he thought with anger. One wrong move, and either Icetail's or her life could be taken away. And what about Sweetheart? Where was she? *I'm such an idiot!*

"Don't worry about her," sneered Graysoul, taking small steps forward. "She's okay. For now."

Icetail looked down to the ground, defeated. "What do you want?" he demanded. "Why would you do this?"

Graysoul shrugged. "I don't know. Why *would* we do this?" meowed the gray cat. "It's all in the paws of Sandstar. She orders you to go back to your camp, take as many herbs as you can from the medicine den, bring them to me, and destroy the supply before my very eyes."

Sandstar wants me to do that because she wants MoonClan's warriors to become weak, Icetail realized with fear. *She wants us to be sick during leaf-bare. With no medicine, no cat can be cured!*

"That's so cruel," Icetail whispered.

"And," Graysoul went on, "you will meet us by the herb patch. As soon as you get there, you will trample the growing herbs. Understood?"

"Why me?" Icetail growled.

"Sandstar probably wants to make you feel like you were responsible for your Clanmate's deaths in leaf-bare," Graysoul laughed. "She's a humorous cat, you see. Nothing can be done without meaning behind it."

Icetail snarled. "Do you realize that once you let me go, I can bring my Clanmates with me to attack you?"

Graysoul shook his head. "Do *you* realize that doing something that stupid will put Silverpaw's life on edge?" he asked. "Sure, if I die, I'm taking that little brat with me."

Icetail bristled. *What am I going to do?* he thought with dread, looking around his surroundings. Realization hit Icetail on the head, as if StarClan was answering his prayers. "There is one flaw to your plan," he said, standing taller. "You're all alone. There's nobody stopping me from attacking you right now!"

Graysoul growled. "You wouldn't dare."

Without warning, Icetail leaped at Graysoul, pinning him down. "For my Clanmates, I will!"

Graysoul snarled, pushing Icetail off of him. *DarkClan isn't all that smart!* Icetail thought with a sense of victory in his belly. *Especially for picking a fight with me inside the heart of MoonClan's territory!*

Feeling more at an advantage, Icetail leaped overhead on the branches, and crashed down onto Graysoul's back. Using his surroundings as a weapon, Icetail remembered the intense battle training he had with Brightstar. For Silverpaw's sake, he can't lose this fight!

Graysoul yowled as Icetail sunk his teeth in his neck. "DarkClan . . . will avenge . . . me," sputtered Graysoul as the fire died away from his eyes. When he stopped moving, Icetail released the warrior and let him fall to the ground. Climbing off the dead warrior, he observed Graysoul with no remorse. It was either him or Icetail's life, and in this situation, Icetail couldn't die unless he knew his

friends were safe. He was going to have to inform Brightstar of what had happened. Right now, however, was not the time to drag Graysoul's dead body to camp to explain the fight. No, now was the time to find Silverpaw. He also wondered about Sweetheart. Did she wander somewhere else? Is she safe? The only MoonClan medicine cat *couldn't* die, especially with no other cat in MoonClan who knew the ways of medicine. Since DarkClan was targeting MoonClan's medicine supply, fear entered his heart.

They couldn't have possibly killed her, right? he thought with worry.

Icetail fled from his spot, finding his way to the herb patch. He had to be swift but he also had to be silent. Looking up to the sky, he realized that the sun was setting. Soon it would be dark, and the moon would be out.

Icetail had no time to waste.

Chapter Thirty Two

Edited ✔

Hi readers! I just have one request to support this series. Is it okay if you guys comment, vote and especially share more? It's amazing how many people enjoy my series, and I am glad to be writing for your enjoyment. But I'd feel even more motivated if there were more people that I could write for :) thank you for the continued support, and I hope you like this new chapter!

Icetail's fur was on end when he spotted Silverpaw, hissing and snarling to a cat so familiar that it made Icetail's heart break. *Dewfang against Silverpaw—no, that can't happen!* Icetail's brother was a fierce warrior with real battle experience. On top of that, he was now a known murderer in the Clans. *She'll be shredded!* he thought with fear. And if he jumped out there, then he would have to fight his own kin, the very brother he grew up with.

He watched from the bushes as Silverpaw defended herself, backing away slowly. Before cutting in, he hoped could find out what his brother was doing now that he was exiled from MoonClan. *He couldn't have possibly joined DarkClan, right*? he thought, recalling Graysoul's ambush. That would be the only place he could go to without being called a murderer. It made sense!

"Why are you here?" demanded Silverpaw. She was shaking with fear. She only had a few moons worth of battle training, making her significantly weaker than him.

Dewfang's tail lashed eagerly. "To see the death of my brother."

"You can't kill Icetail!" she spat in reply. "You're a coward and a traitor! You're nothing but that!"

Dewfang shook his head. "I did this all for a good purpose," meowed the brilliantly white-furred warrior. "On the day of our apprentice ceremony, everything began, Silverpaw. It is beyond your

understanding. I had a dream that night, where I was being chased in a dark forest by a cat who seemed like he wanted to kill But then I finally stopped and listened to what he had to say. He told me that I could rule the Clans, that I can be the strongest and most powerful cat in this whole forest. And who'd turn down an offer like that?"

"Where is this going?" Silverpaw whispered, taking another step back. Icetail's fur was on end.

I had a very similar dream, he thought, *but the only difference was that I wasn't given that offer. I was only given the offer to live or die.*

"I was getting there," said Dewfang, taking a step forward. "This cat told me that I had to kill someone in order to achieve leadership, and I agreed to it. The one I had to kill was a gray cat—no, a silver cat. Her fur was as brilliant as yours, it looked as if the stars itself were in her pelt! She came to me, and then I did what I was told—I killed her. She didn't suspect it! Her beauty did not stop me from taking a step closer to destiny."

Icetail listened with horror. *That's why I also was stunned by Silverpaw's appearance when she was born! We both met that beautiful silver she-cat. She had saved me . . . while on the other paw, Dewfang killed her.*

"You see now, Icetail?" Dewfang called, his head snapping towards Icetail's direction. Icetail froze in spot, his fur bristling when he realized that he'd been spotted. "There's always a reason behind everything, brother!"

"I see that your senses are still sharp as ever," snarled Icetail, forcing himself to stand. He knew that he was at a disadvantage now that he had been seen, but there was nowhere to run to now.

Dewfang laughed. "I knew you were there this whole time, Icetail. My real objective was to let you know *my* half of the story. By the way, where's Graysoul?"

"Graysoul's dead," Icetail said bluntly.

"I told him to be careful around you," muttered Dewfang with annoyance. "Anyway, let's settle this, okay? I know what you want."

Icetail watched his brother. "As long as you keep Silverpaw out of this," he snapped. "And as long as you don't involve MoonClan!"

Dewfang shrugged. "We'll see!"

"Icetail, no!" Silverpaw cried. "Don't do this for me!"

Icetail already leaped at his brother, swiping at his eyes. Dewfang doubled back, avoiding Icetail's deadly claws, and lunged on top of his head, biting down on his ears. Icetail tumbled down by the heavy weight of his brother, but he did not give up so easily.

"I never would of thought it was you!" Icetail yowled to his brother. "I never thought that we'd have to fight like this! Doesn't blood mean anything to you?"

Icetail pushed Dewfang away from his neck and leaped to his paws, using his back claws to give Dewfang a blow to the face. Both of the brothers' blood was staining each other's fur.

Dewfang leaped at Icetail again, his claws unsheathed. He knocked over his brother once more, exposing Icetail's belly. "What matters is the blood of my enemies!"

Icetail used his hindlegs to kick Dewfang off of him. "I was never your enemy!" he snarled. "If you leave now and never show your face in MoonClan again, I won't kill you!"

"Like you can!" Dewfang spat.

"Let me help!" Silverpaw insisted, watching from the side with widened eyes. "I can't stand this!"

"Don't!" Icetail snapped. *This is my battle!*

Dewfang and Icetail wrestled each other, hissing and snarling and spitting with rage. Their ears were drawn back as they countered each other's moves, trying to predict what will happen next. Icetail bit down hard on his brother's tail, and Dewfang screeched with

fury, shoving Icetail down to the ground by smacking him hard on the head. Dewfang's eyes sparked with fury.

This battle was much harder than the fight with Graysoul. That DarkClan cat was weak, but Dewfang was strong—the two of them easily matched each other's moons of training and strength.

Dewfang took advantage of having his brother pinned and swiped furiously with his front paws. Icetail received a heavy blow to his shoulder and he cried out in pain. *That's not . . . going to stop me!* he thought, determined to protect Silverpaw.

But before anyone did anything else, a cat leaped out of the undergrowth. Icetail looked at the cat's figure and caught a glance of his face. It was another DarkClan warrior! He was about to leap onto Silverpaw, but the apprentice dodged his attack with swift movement.

Icetail turned back to his own battle, knowing that it's too dangerous to let his attention go astray. *She must take care of herself!*

Dewfang laughed bitterly. "Had enough, Icetail?"

"I'm not stopping until you're dead," he declared with rage. Icetail barely managed to get his claws on Dewfang's pelt; he only left a few scratches on his flank and face. Despite his strong words, he was tired already. The only thing that kept Icetail up to Dewfang's match was pure adrenaline alone—otherwise, the winner would have already been determined. But now, the exhaustion and lack of sleep was suddenly catching up, causing his struggles to become weaker and weaker.

This is going to be the end of me! Icetail thought with deep dread.

Dewfang raised his paw high with his claws fully unsheathed. He was positioned to give Icetail a killing blow. He had no time to move . . . this was it!

But suddenly, it was as if StarClan sent help. Another cat entered the battle-field in a hurry, leaping out from the undergrowth in front of Icetail. Dewfang's claws raked across the cat's throat,

causing her to fall to the ground with a thud. Icetail immediately made out his leader, a pool of blood emerging around her neck.

"Brightstar!"

Dewfang, dissatisfied, looked down to Brightstar, and then back to Icetail, backing away. "Argh! I'll see you another day, Icetail," hissed his brother, sprinting out of the herb patch.

"Don't leave now!" Icetail yowled after his brother. "Don't run away just because you know she is going to wake up again!"

When Brightstar would wake up again, then she would help Icetail beat Dewfang, and two warriors against one was an easy battle.

But Dewfang was already gone. Icetail turned to Silverpaw, who had a few scratches on her pelt. She was still battling the DarkClan warrior. Icetail leaped from his spot and pinned down the smaller warrior, ignoring the massive pain on his shoulder. "Get out, or I'll kill you!" he snarled to the tom.

The tom kicked Icetail off and ran after Dewfang. Icetail was panting. He collapsed on the ground just as Brightstar had, exhausted out of his mind. *Now that they're gone . . . can I rest?* he thought, pain scorching his whole body.

He looked at Brightstar as she recovered her life, and then his gaze turned to Silverpaw. Her blue eyes were wide, and her pelt was shaking.

"I'm so sorry," Silverpaw said. "I should of been more careful. Now you're all hurt."

"I-I'm fine," Icetail said, his body in pain. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I had an outbreak. I was so pathetic. I shouldn't have run, or else we could have handled it together."

Silverpaw's eyes watered. "This shouldn't of happened to you," she whispered. "You're not pathetic, Icetail."

Icetail buried his nose in her starry pelt. "I'll protect you forever, Silverpaw. You won't ever have to worry again." Silverpaw nodded

and relaxed, but didn't say anything more. Icetail looked at Brightstar once more, not seperating from Silverpaw's touch.

The leader's eyes opened and she gasped for air. Her wound wasn't as severe as Icetail's, but it also wasn't too good. "Icetail," she murmured. "You're okay."

Icetail nodded. "I'm okay," he managed. "Did you see Sweetheart while you were out there?"

Brightstar nodded and staggered up to her paws. "I did. That's how I knew you were here. I-I found her wondering around, she told me she and Silverpaw were looking for you. I began helping her until we found a dead DarkClan cat on the territory, and from there, I followed your scent all the way here while Sweetheart rushed back to camp."

Icetail tried to stand up as well, his wounds reopening. Silverpaw let him lean on her for support. "We should get back before Dewfang returns," he murmured, wincing in pain. "There could be more DarkClan cat's lurking around. We need more patrols out in the territory."

"You sound like your father," Brightstar laughed weakly. "How can you act so strong? Just look at those wounds!"

Icetail looked at his paws. "I have to be strong because MoonClan needs me to be," he murmured, the sadness entering his heart once more.

Brightstar's eyes glimmered. "We *all* have to be strong."

* * *

With the support of Silverpaw, both Icetail and Brightstar managed to make it back to MoonClan in one piece. Every cat crowded with curiosity and worry as to what has happened to the patrol.

"I bet it was Dewfang again!" Rainwhisker acused angrily. "That no-good traitor!"

"Is he working with DarkClan?" Adderclaw growled.

"I bet he is," hissed Sedgetooth.

"We should attack them!" declared Goldpaw.

Icetail ignored everyone as he made his way to the medicine den. He collapsed right at Sweetheart's paws. Brightstar sat right next to him, looking at Sweetheart hopefully. "Will he be okay?" she asked the medicine cat.

"Of course he will," said Sweetheart. "He's always been such a strong cat."

"Can I help?" Silverpaw asked. "I don't want to leave his side."

"Sure," Sweetheart said. "Lick his scratches clean and smoothen out his fur. Then, chew this goldenrod into a poultice and rub it on his gash. Close the wound with a cobweb when you have the goldenrod in place." She passed her a medicine herb. "I'll be tending to Brightstar. Call me when you're done so I can take on from there."

Silverpaw nodded and went right to work on Icetail's wounds. She was gentle and quiet. Icetail liked the peace that was in the medicine den, and he sighed, allowing himself to feel relaxed.

Outside the medicine den, Icetail heard his father, Sparrowheart, assigning border patrols, scout patrols and hunting patrols throughout the territory before he came to check on Icetail and Brightstar. His father looked down to Icetail with warmth in his eyes.

Sparrowheart touched his cold nose to his son's fur. "Even if you don't know it, you're the talk of the Clan, Icetail."

"Well, something's not new," he laughed weakly. His stupid actions always made him the talk of the Clan, from stories of his compulsive choices in the past to the fact that he is Dewfang, the famous traitor's, brother.

Sparrowheart sighed as he took a seat besides Icetail. "Dewfang was always such a good cat. No one ever expected him. He was even so popular in MoonClan. I can't believe he's been behind this *all* along." Icetail's father's eyes clouded with grief and sadness. "This

isn't fair. Why is this happening? I lost Featherbreeze, and now I lost Dewfang. I don't know what I would of done if I had lost you, too."

"You won't," Icetail said. *But I'm not making any promises*, he thought to himself.

"You should help Brightstar back to her own den," Sweetheart suggested to the deputy. "Icetail needs the space to recover."

Brightstar nodded. "I'll be in my den if you need me, Icetail." She got up and left with the support of Sparrowheart.

Icetail sighed and shut his eyes. He wasn't planning on falling asleep, but he did. For once, he didn't dream about the future. For once, he dreamt of his past.

* * *

"Featherbreeze!" Icekit cried, pawing at his mother. "Can I please *play with Dawnkit and the others? I feel so left out! No fair!"*

He struggled and flailed in her grasp, but she didn't let her tiny kit go so easily. Featherbreeze chuckled and licked his fur clean. "Why leave when you can spend time with me?" she asked him. "Besides, I have to clean you up. You're all dirty!"

Icekit snorted. "It's not my *fault that there was a mud puddle in the way," he muttered. Even though he was annoyed, he stopped struggling, and let Featherbreeze clean his fur all the way through. After it returned to its soft kit-like state, she finally let Icekit go outside the nursery.*

At the time, he was only recently born into the Clan . Ripplefur was an apprentice and was known as Ripplepaw. Dawnkit, Volekit and Sweetki t still slept in the nursery. Sparrowheart wasn't the deputy of MoonClan at the time, but rather, he was considered one of the senior warriors . Brightstar always seemed to beam with happiness. Vinetail was still alive and well . Last but not least, Dewkit was still a good cat.

By far, this was the happiest time of Icetail's life. Everyone he cared about was there — if Silverpaw, Squirrelpaw and Flameheart didn't count. He didn't understand what death was, he didn't have to worry

about food or if he' d live to see tomorrow. He didn't feel like prey at the time.

It was truly the happiest time of his life.

* * *

Icetail woke up a few moments later. The dream was short, but it was warm and nice and comforting. He sighed, wanting that feeling of security once more even though he knew it wouldn't come to him.

"Is something wrong?" Silverpaw whispered to him. "There must be something on your mind." Her silver pelt was brilliant against the setting sun. She was beautiful.

"I had a dream," Icetail confessed. "It was during my kithood. Your mother was there, and my mother too. Everyone in MoonClan was there. It was so happy. These were bright and good days. Nothing is like that anymore . . . days became dark. I forgot what it was like to see everyone so happy."

Silverpaw shook her head. "Even though things are hard, it's not like we're unhappy, Icetail. If we were unhappy, we wouldn't fight for MoonClan every day." She paused for a moment, before meowing, "Thank you for saving me, by the way. That's all you ever do for me. I hate being so weak."

Icetail shook his head. "No, you're not weak. I'm a warrior, so I have more experience than you. One day, when you're named too, I'm sure you'll be as strong as the other warriors. So right now, it's not your responsibility—"

"To take care of myself?" Silverpaw asked, a little annoyed.

Icetail purred. "That's right. I told you, I'll protect you forever."

Silverpaw sighed. "Fine. Do what you want," she murmured. "But you know, I'll have to protect you, too, since you're so reckless."

Icetail nodded. *That's fine my me*, he thought. *I need a little break anyways. I've pushed myself to hard.*

After that fight with Dewfang, all he wanted now was a few more days of rest. He didn't want to think of the prophecy anymore. He didn't want to think of Dewfang. Now, all he wanted was a moment in time to recover from the harsh realities of the Clans.

Chapter Thirty Three

Edited ✔

Icetail finally felt like he was returning back to normal.

For a few days, he didn't leave on a patrol. He remained within the safety of MoonClan's camp, just as Sparrowheart had been nagging and Sweetheart advised. Lately, he felt more and more rested and confident, especially since he got to know his Clanmates a little more during his time of rest.

He didn't do much for the past few days. He'd listen to the stories of the elders, take Sweetheart's medicine so his shoulder wound could heal quicker, he would hang around with the kits more, help the apprentices with their duties, and get to know the senior warriors and their past lives better.

He was even getting closer to Silverpaw. For the first time ever, he felt warm because of her, and his thoughts and wonders about the prophecy of darkness were going astray. He knew that he'd soon have to get back on track though, but for now, he just wanted to rest.

Currently, he took Nightrose's place to watch her kits, Amberkit, Blackkit, and Goldenkit. Goldpaw was with them, playing a game of Clans that they all seemed to enjoy.

"You can never beat AmberClan, you GoldClan scum!" spat Amberkit, right beside her brother Blackkit.

"Never!" responded Goldpaw. "The golden warriors shall rule this forest!"

Icetail purred as he watched them. Their game of Clans was actually quite amusing, considering the fact that Goldpaw and Goldenkit together made a Clan called GoldClan.

He watched as Blackkit leaped at Goldenkit, but Goldpaw easily defended her 'Clanmate' by knocking him down with her strong forepaw.

"Go get Amberstar, Goldenstar!" Goldpaw meowed, turning to her companion.

"On it!" Goldenkit meowed, rushing after Amberkit. She tackled Amberkit down, imitating Goldpaw's moves. Goldenkit was actually quite good at imitating the older she-cat, and Icetail had a feeling that she would become a great learner as an apprentice.

Amberkit snarled. "That's no fair! You're an apprentice, Goldpaw! You're helping Goldenkit cheat *and* you'll beat Blackkit!"

"I can take Goldpaw on," Blackkit growled, pushing her off of him. He stood with pride. "Don't underestimate me just because I'm a kit."

"It's Gold*heart* to you!" Goldpaw snapped. "I'm no silly apprentice. I'm the sole deputy of GoldClan!" She puffed out her chest in pride, and her golden eyes gleamed.

"Take this, you mongrel!" Blackkit shot back, leaping on her.

Icetail laughed. All of the kits, including the apprentice, glanced quickly at him. "You know, you're posture is all wrong, Blackkit," he said. "You look like a duck fishing in water with your rump so high."

"Ha!" Amberkit squeaked.

"No I don't!" retorted Blackkit. He got back in a crouch, but this time, he fixed his posture. "See? I'm awesome at crouching."

"All of you kits got it wrong. Goldpaw, why don't you show them so your battle can be more fair?" he asked her. She nodded, and the kits eagerly gasped.

"Battle-training! Battle-training!" Goldenkit changed. She got into a messy posture already, and looked up at Goldpaw for approval. "Is this good?" she asked her Clanmate. Icetail remembered when

Silverpaw was a kit and she'd always ask for training from him. He enjoyed the good memories.

Goldpaw shrugged, studying her Clanmate. "Try and lean more closer to the ground, y'know, so close that your belly fur grazes with it. And keep your tail down, too." She gave an example of an almost-perfect hunting crouch. Amberkit copied Goldpaw and got it exactly. "That's perfect, Amberkit!"

"Yay!" Amberkit squeaked, leaping onto Icetail. "Did you see? I did it!"

"Ow!" Icetail grunted in pain, even though he exaggerated a bit. "Don't kill me!"

Amberkit laughed. "You're no match for me!"

"I suppose you're right," Icetail meowed. "But when my shoulder wounds completely heal, then you'll be pinned to the ground in an instant."

"That's cause you're a warrior!" retorted Blackkit, pouncing on Icetail's back.

Icetail grunted in pain again. "You two are heavy," he groaned.

"We're like the sizes of apprentices already!" Goldenkit said eagerly. "Soon enough Brightstar will name us apprentices! Who knows if you'll be my mentor?"

Silverpaw padded up, letting out *mrrows* of laughter. "You kits look like you are all wearing out Icetail," she pointed out, amused. "Looks like he'll have to be sent to the elder's den early."

"No way!" Icetail said, playfully leaping at her.

"See! I knew you were faking it!" Goldenkit grumbled.

Icetail purred at Goldenkit. "It was nice playing with you, but I suppose I have to go," said Icetail. "Right, Silverpaw?" He looked at Silverpaw, wondering if she actually needed something. Not much has been going on for the past few days.

"Right," Silverpaw said with a laugh. "I have to talk to Icetail without any kits listening in."

"Icetail and Silverpaw are in *love*!" teased Goldpaw, bouncing around them. Even though she was about the age of Silverpaw, Goldpaw had always been an excited she-cat and had the personality of a kit. "Icetail and Silverpaw! Icetail and Silverpaw!"

"Oh, shut up," said Icetail.

"Seriously," complained Silverpaw.

Goldpaw sighed. "You two are no fun . . . Alright, I'll keep the kits occupied, Icetail. You can run along!" she purred, looking at Silverpaw once more.

I bet she's still thinking that I'm in love with Silverpaw, thought Icetail. *That's not true! She's just my friend!* He padded after her, lost in thought. He looked at the silver-furred apprentice and his heart skipped a beat. *Right*? "What did you want to talk about?"

"Sweetheart wants to check on your wound," she replied, "so she sent me to get you."

He nodded. The pain was still there, but it was faint and Icetail barely could notice it anymore. He felt that the gash was becoming a mere scar now to merge in with the rest of his battle scars. He thought about Dewfur. *I wonder where my brother is now*, he thought.

He followed Silverpaw to the medicine den, his gaze on the camp entrance. He felt that his brother would walk in, not as an enemy, but merely back from a patrol as if his treachery had all been a dream of Icetail's. He sighed with sadness, knowing that it was but a mere fantasy for that to happen.

I shouldn't think about Dewfang, Icetail decided. *Thinking of him will not help my recovery. No, it will make the scar in my heart burn worse.* He looked over his shoulder to see that Goldpaw and the kits were still playing. *I don't think I need to bother them for a while*.

"Wait here," whispered Silverpaw. "I'm going to see if Sweetheart is available."

Icetail nodded and sat down, wrapping his tail around his paws. A moment later, Silverpaw returned and gestured him inside. At the same moment, Sagepelt limped out of the den.

"Thanks, Sweetheart! I feel much better," meowed the she-cat over her shoulder. Judging by the smell blood on her paw, Icetail guessed that she must've stepped on a thorn.

"Your welcome, Sagepelt. Oh, Icetail! Good, you're here," said Sweetheart when she noticed him. "Let me see your shoulder."

Icetail nodded and sat down, while Silverpaw reached up and unwrapped the cobwebs around the gash with her teeth. Sweetheart put a paw on it, and Icetail winced, pain coming its way. The gash was nothing but a mere cut now, but it was still painful when cats touched it.

"I don't think it's infected, and you really don't need more treatments," Sweetheart said. She shook her head. "Wait, no. I'm being an idiot . . . you might be in pain. Does it hurt?"

"Only when it's poked," Icetail explained.

Sweetheart frowned. "I suppose I used the wrong herbs on your shoulder."

Icetail felt bad. *I should've told her how much the pain improved*! he thought. He didn't mean to make her feel bad. He was about to open his mouth to tell her, but she cut him off by a deep sigh.

"I'm sorry. I'm not helping at all," Sweetheart murmured. "I'm trying to be a good medicine cat, but I'm close to nothing without Vinetail." She looked down to her paws sadly.

Sweetheart's hurting too, realized Icetail. *But her pain is her grief, just like mine and the rest of MoonClan's.*

"Vinetail wouldn't want you saying that!" gasped Silverpaw. "You're an amazing medicine cat in his place." She put her tail over Sweetheart's shoulder. "You're the only cat in MoonClan that knows the way of the medicine. If you give up, then there'd be no cat to take care of us. We trust you, so you have to trust yourself too,

Sweetheart!"

Icetail nodded in agreement. "And I was about to tell you how much better I'm doing, all thanks to you."

Sweetheart gave a sad smile. "I suppose you're right. I shouldn't complain. Silverpaw, I need your help. Clean his wound with wet moss."

Silverpaw nodded and padded outside the den, grabbing a piece of moss before she left the camp to go to the nearby river. Icetail sighed, thinking. *On the first day of my apprenticeship, I went to that river with Dewpaw and our mentors . . . those days were so well. I don't know what happened!*

"Good, she's gone," said Sweetheart. Then, her gaze looked down to Icetail and her eyes narrowed. "Icetail, I wanted to talk to you about something. The other night, I had a dream. I saw no StarClan cats . . . but I did see you." She kept her hard gaze on him, and Icetail tensed.

I never tell any cat about my dreams, he thought nervously. *What if she is having the same dreams that I've had*? "What was I doing in your dream, Sweetheart?" he asked cautiously.

Her voice lowered. "I was in a big clearing, and there were many cats there as well. You were at the base of a large rock, looking up at Dewfang in shame as the clearing of cats chanted '*Dewstar*.' "

Icetail tensed. He had that dream before! That was the dream that came to him before Dewfang had left MoonClan. Fear swept over him. He heard someone pad into the medicine den, and Flameheart's scent overcame the space.

"I am sorry that I was eavesdropping," he said, dipping his head, "but Icetail's name wasn't the one that was being chanted as a leader's name?"

"I heard the name Dewstar, loud and clear," responded Sweetheart.

Icetail's gaze kept to his paws. *Flameheart must think I am the cat who is going to destroy*! he thought with dread. *So must Sweetheart*! He

wondered what he was going to do for a moment, until Silverpaw padded back inside the den, carrying the wet moss.

"Hi Flameheart," she said, as she passed over to Icetail. Flameheart dipped his head to her in greeting, and then left the medicine den, knowing that this matter can't be discussed in front of her. She put the wet moss over his wound, and the cold water cleaned the area soothingly.

"Good job," Sweetheart told Silverpaw. "Now all you need to do is put a cobweb onto it, and he will be ready."

"Alright," said Silverpaw, doing as told. Icetail felt better already when the process was done. He smiled gratefully towards the silver apprentice, despite feeling worry in his chest about the dream.

Sweetheart passed Icetail a poppy seed, ordering, "If you want a restful night, you should eat that." She leaned in closer and whispered, "Tonight, I'm going to the Cave of Stars to share my dreams with StarClan. I hope . . . that I find my answers there." And with that, she padded outside the medicine den.

Silverpaw looked curious. "What was she whispering about?"

Icetail shrugged. "She told me . . . to make sure that you take over the medicine den while she is gone tonight. She must of noticed how much you volunteered to help me and she probably trusts you."

Silverpaw laughed. "I helped you that much?"

"You wouldn't leave my side all this time," he remarked, laughing as well. *She doesn't suspect my lie*, he thought.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" yowled the leader of MoonClan. Icetail looked outside the den at Brightstar, wondering what was going on.

He shrugged and padded outside the den with Silverpaw. When every cat had gathered, Brightstar began her announcement.

"Yesterday, Silverpaw and Squirrelpaw had their warrior assessment," she said. Silverpaw tensed and looked up eagerly. Icetail never had one of those because he became a warrior for saving his Clan. He suddenly wondered what happened at these assessments. "I've asked Grayfur and Bluewing of their progress, and they confirmed that the apprentices had passed. Correct?"

"That's right," said Bluewing. "Squirrelpaw's results were excellent."

Grayfur nodded in agreement. "Silverpaw is ready to become a warrior!"

Silverpaw gasped eagerly right besides Icetail. He smiled, proud of her and her brother. *I'm glad I got to watch them grow up*, he thought.

"So these two apprentices are ready to become warriors! I, leader of MoonClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn." She paused and looked in Icetail's direction, where the small apprentice trembled with excitement. "Silverpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your own life?"

"I do!" she said loudly.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Silverpaw, from this moment on, you will be known as Silverleaf. StarClan honors your spirit, warmth and thoughtfulness, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MoonClan."

"Silverleaf! Silverleaf!" every cat of MoonClan cheered.

Brightstar padded from her den, and rest her muzzle on top of Silverleaf's head. She licked her leader's shoulder in respect, and the two broke apart. Brightstar padded back the Moonrock, now getting on with Squirrelpaw's ceremony. He was named Squirreltail for his strength, bravery and courage.

Brightstar continued, "Tonight will be their warrior vigils. They will stay up all night in the silence of the Clan as said in the warrior

code. That will be all for this matter. Congratulations, Silverleaf and Squirreltail!"

Squirreltail bounded over swiftly to where Silverleaf and Icetail were. "We're warriors!" he said excitedly. "I can't believe it!"

"Believe it!" Silverleaf responded, smiling brightly.

"You two should not talk too much," advised Icetail. "I'm going to sleep since the sun is setting. Remember to watch over the medicine den, Silver*leaf*. And keep your eyes on the camp entrance, Squirrel*tail*. Don't fall asleep."

"Night!" said Squirreltail, before turning to talk to his sister once more.

* * *

That night, Icetail was restless in a way. He was uncomfortable in his nest, and his fur was on edge the whole night. When the next morning came, the sun was covered heavily by dark gray clouds, and the day was dim. His gaze remained on the sky, and he knew very well that the dark clouds were not going to rain judging by the smell—it lacked rainwater.

That's weird, he thought. *Why are the clouds there but no rain? These kind of clouds should only come when there'd be a heavy downpour.*

He looked closer, and realized something; *No, this is not natural. This is an omen!* His heart beat hard and unsteadily fast in his chest. *StarClan's telling me something. They're giving me a warning.*

Th e darkness is close . . .

Chapter Thirty Four

Edited ✔

A moon later, Icetail thought about the unusual dark day every single night. The thought barely left his mind, and the omen never stopped haunting him.

The days were slow to him, as he wanted them to pass faster, but of course, it wouldn't happen. The prophecy weighed on his shoulders as a burden alone . . . He secretly wished that it was never him who was involved with all this drama. He wished that it were some other cat. But he'd often shake the thought away, knowing how selfish that was.

He padded through the green forest, enjoying the sun on his pelt. It was a little cold that day, so he wanted every single bit of warmth that the forest had to offer; for soon it would be leaf-fall, and then leaf-bare, the coldest season out of all.

A robin chirped within a tree, letting out it's song to the other birds as if claiming its territory. He could hear it, but he couldn't see it. Suddenly, its annoying song stopped, and he heard it squawk in pain. Silverleaf leaped out of the branches from above Icetail, proudly carrying the dead robin in her jaws.

Icetail felt a little amused. "Thank StarClan you caught that annoying thing," he meowed. "It was scaring away all the prey in the forest. I couldn't hear a thing except for that bird!"

Silverleaf dug a hole in the ground and buried it the best she could. "It'll be a good meal," she commented. "And you're right. One reason I decided to catch it is because if it wasn't so loud I wouldn't have killed it in the first place!"

"What's the other part?"

"The Clan could go hungry," she remarked grimly, continuing to pad

through the forest. Right now, Icetail, Silverleaf and Shadowheart were on Rainwhisker's moss-collecting patrol near StreamClan's cave of mosses.

At the moment, there were no apprentices. Goldsun, Shiningmoon and Thornheart had become warriors just a few days ago, and the current kits were still too young to become apprentices, so all the warriors were supposed to carry out the apprentice duties until Goldenkit, Amberkit and Blackkit could do them.

Icetail hadn't been to the cave of mosses in moons, let alone talk to Shadowheart properly. He didn't hold his grudge anymore, but in his mind, he still felt a little awkward talking to Shadowheart. He only spoke to the warrior when it was convenient. He hoped that it would change soon, since he wanted to become close to all the warriors of MoonClan despite their differences.

He was walking right behind the two toms with Silverleaf at his side. The cave of mosses was in view in the distance, and he was not eager going inside. Due to terrible past experiences, he was still not fond of tight spaces.

When they got to the cave entrance, he stepped back. "You three go along inside," he offered. "I'll keep guard."

Shadowheart nodded. "That's fine. Good thinking, Icetail."

He dipped his head in a nod and posted right outside the cave.

"I'll stay with him," Silverleaf offered. "Three full grown cats within is a little too small of a space." She sat right beside Icetail, curling her fluffy tail over her paws neatly.

"I don't mind," Rainwhisker said. He crouched down, and gulped in a large amount of breath before crawling within the tunnel swiftly. Icetail could hear Rainwhisker exhale deeply on the other side, letting out the breath he was holding eagerly.

Shadowheart, without another word, followed Rainwhisker.

Icetail kept his gaze out in the distance. The day was getting a little dim. It seemed as if it would rain. The grass smelled like fresh dew,

and the sky tasted moist on his tongue. The nearby forest of MoonClan buzzed with prey that was readying itself for the upcoming cold weather.

As he sat in the silence, he spotted a rabbit in the distance within the long grass, hopping around MoonClan's side of the border.

"Watch this," whispered Silverleaf, getting into a crouching position.

Icetail observed as she stealthily stalked towards the rabbit, her tail low on the ground, but high enough not to sweep over it. Her paws didn't make a sound; she was as silent as wind and as graceful as a willow tree gently blowing in a breeze.

When she got close enough to the brown creature, she leaped quickly and close to the ground, booking on to its hindquarters with fully extended claws. The rabbit squealed with surprise and fear, immediately trying to escape, but Silverleaf swiftly clambered over it and dug her teeth into it's neck, delivering a killing bite. The rabbit stopped moving in a matter of seconds.

She padded over, the dead creature limp in her jaws.

"That was great!" he praised her. "You looked so natural out there. A talented hunter already." He purred.

"I think you'd have caught it, too," she remarked. "Besides, you knew it was there before me. I only noticed it because you were looking at it."

"You were still great nonetheless. Say, have you ever tried to catch birds in the sky?" he asked her. When she shook her head, he whispered, "Then watch this."

Nearby, he heard the gentle flapping of the bird's wings close to the ground. Overhead, three birds were flying right above Icetail as if they hadn't sensed him. He wiggled his haunches before he leaped high into the air, and he caught hold onto one of the bird's wings.

It was a dove. Its wings fluttered and spasmed as he grabbed a hold onto the bird's chest, dragging it from the air and onto the ground. He scooped down and bit into its neck, killing it swiftly and easily.

Silverleaf looked amazed. "How could you hear it? You have amazing senses," she complimented.

"No, not really. Ever since it became harder to smell things, I only got better at hearing," he explained. Before Silverleaf could reply, rain started to gently come down—at first, just a few drops, until it became a downpour. "Fox-dung," Icetail muttered.

He hated getting wet.

"I hope Shadowheart and Rainwhisker hurry," Silverleaf said. "I don't like my fur getting wet, either."

He guessed that she could sense his discomfort. He waited for a few moments, wondering when the two warriors would emerge. Icetail felt a little worried, and jumped with surprise when Rainwhisker yowled from inside, "Help!"

Icetail crouched down by the opening of the small tunnel. "What's wrong?" he yelled back. He wondered what was wrong, until he heard it. The rain water was piling up inside the cave, and Shadowheart and Rainwhisker could not get out.

"We're going to drown!" Shadowheart screeched with fear. "The tunnel is blocked!"

Icetail cursed under his breath. "Silverleaf, help me dig out an opening, or at least make the tunnel bigger!" he ordered. "Hurry! The rainwater is going to drown them!"

"On it!" said Silverleaf, beginning to swiftly paw at the muddy ground.

StarClan, don't take my Clanmates from me, please! he silently begged in his mind. *I don't want to lose anyone else!* He was trying to dig as fast as he could just like Silverleaf was, but it wasn't fast enough. The rain was coming down harder, and Icetail became nervous.

"Are you okay down there?" he called as he pawed at the ground.

There were no replies, and Icetail's heart almost stopped. As fast as he could, he finally made an opening, wondering if the water had

overcome his friends and if they had drowned. *Please, don't let it be like that!* He tried making the hole bigger, just big enough to fit a full-grown cat.

He dipped his head down in the water, holding his breath, and reached for the nearest body, wondering who he had gotten. As fast as he could, he pulled the cat out, realizing it was Shadowheart, who was gasping deeply for air.

He coughed and vomited out water. "R-Rainwhisker sunk to the bottom," Shadowheart meowed weakly. "P-please save him . . ."

"I'll get him. Silverleaf, get Shadowheart somewhere dry!" Icetail said. He leaped into the water, and pushed his way down in Rainwhisker's direction. Despite not knowing how to swim, the fear of losing his Clanmate pushed him forward.

He felt around, and finally found Rainwhisker, but Icetail felt that his breath was coming short. Ever since he traveled down into the tunnels where the Twolegs were constructing things, he inhaled their smoke and couldn't smell and breathe as good as he used to. He looked up out of the opening that he had made, and tried to paddle up with Rainwhisker in his jaws, but it was no use.

Icetail's eyes were beginning to hurt, and his lungs were beginning to ache. Rainwhisker must've been worse for being underwater for so long.

I'm sorry Rainwhisker . . . thought Icetail. *I couldn't save you. I couldn't save myself . . . I won't even see Dewfang again. I won't be able to see the outcome of the prophecy of darkness. I'm so sorry.*

But before Icetail even fell unconscious, he felt as if he were a kit again, being scooped off the ground by Featherbreeze. He suddenly realized that real fangs had sunken into his scruff. Somebody was pulling him out! In an instant, his thoughts of despair vanished and he burst right out of the water. Icetail gasped deeply for the sweet air, breathing in and out as if he hadn't in breathed years.

He noticed that the cats who had saved him weren't MoonClan cats —they were of StreamClan. He recognized Flower-river and

Appledrop.

"Quick!" Flowerriver said to Appledrop. "Take the other tom and check if he's breathing. I'll take care of this one."

Appledrop nodded and dragged Rainwhisker away from the flooding cave of mosses, and pressed his ear to his chest. Then, Appledrop swiftly began pumping Rainwhisker's chest with his two paws, until the tom coughed up water and began to breathe again, despite being unconscious.

Flower-river looked at Icetail in the eye. "Are you okay?" she asked him, and he nodded. "Dizzy?" He nodded again.

"H-how . . . did you know we were under there?" he asked weakly.

"I saw the water rising up too swiftly, so we thought there must have been cats under," Flowerriver explained. "You two were lucky."

Icetail nodded, grateful. He was too weak to speak. He looked in the distance, and he recognized Brightstar pounding towards the area, with Flameheart and Redsky following behind as quick as they could run. Icetail was grateful that his Clanmates were coming. He guessed that Silverleaf had gotten help. He could make her out as she followed the group as fast as her paws could take her.

Icetail gathered his strength and walked towards Rainwhisker. *It hurts to breathe*, Icetail thought as he looked down at his Clanmate. Rainwhisker must've felt worse.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get you out so fast," he rasped to Rainwhisker with sadness. "I bet you're hurting too."

Rainwhisker's ear twitched, but his eyes didn't open. "I-it does hurt," he responded weakly. "I-I saw StarClan . . . I really did. But the vision went away when I felt you try and save me—and then everything went b-black."

Icetail realized that Rainwhisker was cold. "We need to get somewhere dry," he pointed out. "Can you stand?"

"N-no," Rainwhisker shivered. "Let me rest."

Icetail nodded and stood over him to shield him from the rain just as Brightstar arrived. She looked back and forth between Icetail, Rainwhisker and the StreamClan cats. "Are you two okay?" she asked worriedly.

"We survived," Icetail responded. "Rainwhisker is freezing, but recovering."

"That's good. Why are there StreamClan cats on our our territory?" she asked, glaring at them.

Flowerriver growled. "MoonClan cats are so ungrateful!" she snapped. "We *saved* your Clanmates from death! If we weren't here, then the both of them would of drowned!" She was glaring back at Brightstar. The MoonClan leader looked back and forth between them. "Besides, be more responsible with your Clan. Rainy days are dangerous, Brightstar."

"Don't tell me how to lead my Clan!" she hissed back before clearing her throat. "Thank you for saving my warriors. Tell Lakestar that I am in his debt, but I can take it on from here. You two should go back to your own territory." She was looking at them with intense eyes, searching for them if they'd threaten her.

Appledrop sighed. "Fine." He turned to Flower-river and whispered, "MoonClan cats should learn how to be grateful to their saviors . . ."

Icetail looked down to Rainwhisker. *I'm grateful. But I can't just leave my friend.* The heavy rain shower almost drowned out the sound of the two cats walking away. *We have to get out of here!*

"Help Rainwhisker," she ordered Redsky and Silverleaf. "Flameheart, you can help Icetail."

Icetail shook his head. "I said I am fine. Just a little stunned."

Flameheart padded beside his friend, allowing him to put his weight down on his side. "I'll let you walk on your own until you're recovered. In the mean time, we must get back to camp as fast as we can before any of us catch a fever."

Icetail sighed and leaned on Flameheart. "Fine. If that's the case, let's hurry."

* * *

Back at camp, Icetail, Shadowheart and Rainwhisker all crowded the inside of the medicine den. Sweetheart was speaking silently with Brightstar, audible enough for Icetail's ears to catch.

"I gave feverfew to Shadowheart and Icetail to prevent them from getting sick," Sweetheart explained to the leader, "but Rainwhisker appears to have whitecough."

"Is it serious?" asked Brightstar with worry in her tone.

"I hope not," said the medicine cat. "I can't really tell yet—but the way Rainwhisker is coughing is not too good. We should have the other two sleep in the apprentice den for the night until they recover. Spreading sickness isn't good, especially as it gets colder."

"I'll have Icetail with me," said Brightstar. "Don't worry. I doubt I will get sick."

Sweetfur nodded. "If you wish."

Icetail thought for a moment. *Why does Brightstar want me with her instead of Shadowheart?* he thought with wonder. She must have something important to discuss. He wondered what it could be.

The rain outside was dying down, but it seemed like there'd be a drizzle all night. He wasn't looking forward to getting his fur wet again.

He could see Nightrose gathering her kits up inside the nursery, and the elders watching the rain fall from their den too. Most the warriors were under the shield of trees and the warrior's den, talking in groups. The senior and younger warriors were all mixed up with each other, which was strange because they'd always seemed to be separate before. Most shared tongues with each other, cleaning their fur from the rain as they dried their pelts.

He saw Silverleaf exit the crowd, padding toward him swiftly

through the rain. "Icetail!" she called. "We need to talk, Icetail!"

Icetail looked at her. "What happened? Here, come in before you get sick too."

Silverleaf got into the den and dipped her head in greeting. "There's something I needed to speak with you about," she said as she caught her breath.

"About what?"

After a few moments, she regained her posture and looked up. "Your recklessness. I heard what you did with Rainwhisker. That was a complete life-death situation."

"When was there not a time I had not been in a life-death situation?" Icetail muttered. She flinched a little at his dry comment, and he simply sighed. "I'm sorry, Silverleaf. I just couldn't leave Rainwhisker like that. I wasn't thinking. But at the same time, all I could think of was saving our Clan from more casualties. Especially since he's my friend."

"What you did was brave and stupid," she responded. "Mostly stupid. But I'm telling you that I'll have every cat in the Clan stick annoyingly close to you if you don't stop."

Icetail remained silent. *I can't stop looking after my Clanmates, but to have them look over me? I can't let that happen,* he thought, *especially by a warrior who is younger than me.* "Fine," he lied. "I'll be careful. Just don't let our Clanmates annoy me."

She nodded. "That takes some stress off my shoulders. I'll see you after the rain stops done coming down!"

And with that, he watched her leave, rushing back towards her brother and the other warriors that crowded the den.

He turned his gaze toward Brightstar, who had just finished conversing with Sweetheart. She must want to talk with him as well. "Come with me, Icetail," she said, "I have some news for you."

Chapter Thirty Five

Edited ✔

Icetail sat right besides Brightstar in his makeshift nest that they set up in her den. "What's the news?" he asked his leader. The leader's den was dark, but comfortable, shielding away all sorts of rain and wind. He wondered how such a large space could only be used for *one* cat.

Brightstar looked to her paws. "Two cats have gone missing," she responded. "Thornheart . . . and your father, Sparrowheart."

Icetail's heart almost stopped. "Why?" he asked immediately. "Why would they leave? Where have they gone?"

Brightstar shook her head. "I do not know." Her voice was low, and her gaze was sad. "I deeply hope that they're okay—but they've been gone since the rain has started. The sun is set and the moon has risen, but it's been covered by clouds so we can't see through the forest. We won't be able to travel until we can see."

Icetail sighed and looked down to his paws. "Please, StarClan. Let them be okay," he murmured. He lied down in his nest, and Brightstar rest a comforting paw over Icetail's shoulder.

"My apprentice," she mewed. "What if MoonClan were to go into a battle, and you knew that they'd lose and you had a choice of survival? What if that survival was . . . joining the opposing side of the battle?"

Icetail's sleepy eyes closed. "Are you kidding? I love my Clan more than life itself and I will fight to the bitter end to keep my Clanmates happy and safe. I would never join the other side." He yawned as he felt Brightstar's comforting touch tense up.

"I only have two lives left," she murmured in his ear. "Sparrowheart will surely become the leader soon."

"Talk about something happy," said Icetail sleepily. "Tomorrow I need to find . . . Sparrowheart." His speech was becoming slurred, and Icetail could barely hold his head up anymore.

"Sleep my apprentice," Brightstar whispered. "Let StarClan bless your dreams. Tomorrow we will solve this."

* * *

When Icetail woke up once more, Brightstar was gone. Instead, right by his side, he wasn't surprised to see Silverleaf asleep, propped up by the wall of the den as if she was watching him for a time. He smiled, but it was short-lived as soon as he remembered the news about Sparrowheart and Thornheart.

He got up from his nest, stretching from his long sleep, followed by a luxurious yawn. He should not be sleeping in a time like this. *I have to see if Sparrowheart and Thornheart are back.* He gently rested Silverleaf in his nest so she could sleep more comfortably, and then he padded outside of the den.

His eyes were immediately blinded by the bright light of the sun, and he squinted to see if he could make out what was going on. The camp was damp, freshly washed from the rainstorm. Rainwhisker seemed to be recovering in the medicine den, but he was still coughing, and Shadowheart was already on his paws, talking softly to the older warriors.

Icetail searched around the camp for his father, but Sparrowheart was not seen. *He must still be missing!* Icetail thought with worry. He knew that he had to go find his father and missing Clanmate. He spotted Brightstar speaking to two senior warriors, Mousetail and Sharpfang.

As he made his way towards his leader, he passed Nightrose and Sagepelt, and he was close enough to make out their conversation. "I'm not sure, but Sweetheart said that she thinks I'm having kits," whispered Sagepelt.

"Kits at *this* time?" Nightrose whispered back. "We're in the middle of a war!"

"*You* had kits in the middle of a war," responded Sagepelt. "Plus, it doesn't feel like a war. There's hardly any real battles anymore. I wonder if DarkClan forgot about it."

"That's not the point," Nightrose said back. "It's almost leaf-bare. This could be difficult for you—"

He averted his ears from their conversation. He was a little curious about the kits, but that is not what he should be listening to right now. He continued through the camp, padding over to his leader and the senior warriors. He felt a little more drawn towards their conversation right now given the situation.

"Hi Brightstar," Icetail greeted.

Sharpfang looked up, barely acknowledging him before turning back to Brightstar. Mousetail and Brightstar, however, returned the greeting.

"Morning Icetail," said the leader. "We were just discussing where we should search for Sparrowheart and Thornheart first."

"I was suggesting near DarkClan," said Mousetail. "I have a strong feeling that they could be nearby there."

"Not DarkClan again!" groaned Icetail. "Whenever a single MoonClan even so approaches them, we have this huge trouble! I almost died many times because of those savages. And not to mention our poor Clanmates!" His words were ice cold. "Why would Sparrowheart be at their borders anyway? And why would he take Thornheart of all cats?"

"Calm down, Icetail," scolded Brightstar. "We don't know the facts. We're still smoothening that out."

"I have to go out and see," said Icetail.

"Are you crazy?" snapped his leader. "The other day you almost *drowned*. Stop being so reckless or I'll ban you from ever going out again!"

"I'm not being reckless," muttered Icetail. *I'm just worried about my*

father and my Clanmate. I have that right! he thought angrily. "Come on, let me *please* go on a patrol? I won't be mouse-brained this time. I just want to search."

Brightstar narrowed her eyes. "I'll be the one to decide that." She turned and began to pad away to the Moonrock with Mousetail following close behind her.

Sharpfang closed his eyes and sighed. "You're a real pain," he growled, before he went after their leader.

Icetail narrowed his eyes, but went after them as well. He sat down in the clearing right besides Ashtail, his previous mentor when he was just a new apprentice. He eyed Ashtail's large chest scar, recalling his first battle with the DarkClan, and hoped that Sparrowheart hadn't come to a similar fate.

Ashtail noticed him staring and waved his tail. Icetail smiled a greeting in response for a brief moment before he looked back up to the Moonrock.

"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" Brightstar summoned, her voice loud and strong.

Every cat padded into the clearing, even Nightrose and her kits although they were still not yet old enough to catch prey. Everyone looked up at her, curious at what was going to happen—the news about Sparrowheart and Thornheart had already reached the ears of all cats.

"As you know," the leader began, "Thornheart and our deputy had gone missing during the storm! We don't know where they'll be; all scents and tracks have been washed away from the rainwater. I'll be assigning search patrols. The first suspected location is DarkClan—Sharpfang, you'll lead the patrol there. Take Bluewing and . . ." Her tail scanned the clearing and landed on Icetail. "You. If you want to go so bad, go with Sharpfang."

Icetail mentally groaned. *Why is she always assigning me with Sharpfang?* But he felt grateful that she was at least letting him out.

"StreamClan's patrol will be lead by Redsky, along with cats she chooses . . ."

Icetail stopped listening to the announcements and padded over to Sharpfang. The older warrior sighed and muttered, "I guess we're stuck with each other again."

Icetail nodded with agreement. "I guess we are."

Bluewing padded over to the group. "We have to leave now," she said. "The sooner we find things out, the better."

Sharpfang beckoned his patrol forward with his tail. "Let's go."

Icetail followed Sharpfang as he led his patrol outside the camp as soon as Brightstar concluded her announcement. Bluewing served as the rear, quietly following the two toms as Icetail made an effort to speak. "I heard Sagepelt might be having kits," he said.

Sharpfang didn't reply.

"Aren't you excited to be a father?" Icetail went on.

Sharpfang sighed. "Stop."

"I'm just trying to talk," Icetail snapped. "What's your problem? What do you have against me?" He wondered deep down about that, too. Sharpfang had always been super dry and cold with Icetail as long as he could recall, even when he was an apprentice. *I don't remember doing anything wrong, I think.*

"It's not you," said Sharpfang. "It's your kin."

"My kin?" Icetail repeated, confused. "What in StarClan's name do you mean?"

"What I mean is, I don't like where you came from," Sharpfang muttered, looking down to his paws. "Ever since that day many seasons ago, I've felt heart-broken. It's all because of your kin."

"Quit it with the riddles and tell me!" growled Icetail.

Bluewing's head was hanging. She probably knew the reason, too. "Every cat from Featherbreeze and Sparrowheart's time know what happened," she murmured. "I do not think you're a kit that needs to be hidden from the truth anymore. Now that there's no cat around, I think you should tell him, Sharpfang."

"I have a right to know," Icetail demanded.

The patrol of three padded through the quiet and damp forest. The air felt tense for Icetail, but deep down, he was excited and scared for Sharpfang's response.

"A long time ago," began the older warrior, "I was an apprentice in MoonClan alongside with your father. Things were bright and happy—DarkClan was snappy all the time, sure, but they were nowhere near as worse as they are now. Those were what we called the pure days."

Bluewing smiled. "I remember it. I was an apprentice, too. In DarkClan, though, their previous leader before Sandstar had kits with his mate. They had two daughters—one kit by the name of Sandkit, and then their first-born, Featherkit."

Icetail's heart almost stopped. "You don't mean—"

"Yes," Sharpfang cut off. "That's your mother. She was originally born into DarkClan as the daughter of their leader, kin of the leadership name."

"Isn't a leader supposed to be chosen, not born?" asked Icetail. *DarkClan surely must follow at least* some *of the warrior code, right? Why in StarClan's name would they abandon it like this?*

"Few cats know the true facts about DarkClan," said Sharpfang, "but Featherbreeze told us everything. She said that the kits of the leaders were normally the heirs to their leadership. Once the leader dies, the most eligible of their kin has the right to become the new leader. Since Featherbreeze was the first-born and the bigger kit, she was the chosen one to become DarkClan's next leader. But when she was an apprentice, things changed. She started coming to the MoonClan borders. That's how we met . . . and we'd meet in secret

for moons before she was caught by a patrol."

"You?" asked Icetail in surprise. He stopped walking, causing the other two to stop with him. "Wasn't Sparrowheart her mate? Don't tell me you're my father!"

"I'm not your father," Sharpfang responded harshly. "And yes, Sparrowheart was her mate. She didn't even know him then—she'd just meet with me and no cat else. But soon, when she was captured for trespassing and taken to MoonClan's camp, she met your father, and they talked, and seemed to have gotten close."

Oh, thought Icetail. *He must of been in love with her. Now that I put two and two together . . . she must have broken his heart by falling in love with Sparrowheart.*

"The day that changed everything was that same quarter moon we had caputed your mother," Bluewing continued. "Featherbreeze—or Featherpaw at that time—stayed in our camp for those next few days because she didn't resist us. But DarkClan got angry, and they wanted to take her back. It was my first battle . . . DarkClan invaded our camp and threatened us that if we did not return their heir, then they would slaughter our Clanmates."

"But Featherpaw stopped it," Sharpfang growled, the memory flashing through his eyes. "She told them that she would return with them, and she did. But then, she came back to our camp two days later carrying a tiny kit in her jaws that went by the name of Ripplekit."

"Silverleaf's and Squirreltail's mother!" exclaimed Icetail. "Their mother was from DarkClan too?"

"Yes, but Ripplefur was never aware of it," explained Bluewing. "Featherpaw had told us that she had stolen Ripplekit from the nursery. She didn't have a kind mother to take care of her. Another battle broke out between MoonClan and DarkClan, but this time, Featherpaw did not go back. She said she wanted to stay with MoonClan, and Brightstar let her. But DarkClan was angry that their heir and one of their kits were gone . . . and they vowed to never let it easy for MoonClan ever again."

"Is that why they tried to steal Silverleaf and Squirreltail when they were kits?" growled Icetail, clawing at the ground. "And you once told me that they tried to steal my brother and I when *we* were kits. Is it all because Featherbreeze was from DarkClan?"

Bluewing nodded. "That's right," she mewed with a sigh. "They tried to steal you two so they could raise you in DarkClan as the new heirs, but it turned out to be unsuccessful. They did manage to steal your sister . . ." Bluewing murmured, her voice getting low.

Icetail's eyes widened. "I have a *sister*?"

"She lives in DarkClan, and she goes by the name of Lilyclaw. Shadowheart also has DarkClan roots, if you did not know. His sister is Deathwing," Bluewing explained. "Over the moons, MoonClan became interlaced with DarkClan through different loyalties but similar kinship. I wouldn't be surprised if you'd ever met Lilyclaw in battle."

"Why didn't Featherbreeze ever steal Lilyclaw back?" whispered Icetail, pain gripping his thought. *I wonder what growing up with Lilyclaw would of been like.* "Did Featherbreeze not . . . *care* for her?"

"Featherbreeze loved her," murmured Sharpfang, eyes flashing with grief. "She was devastated when Lilyclaw was taken. We were ready to take her back, but Featherbreeze stopped us and told us that it's best not to do it. She explained to us that they'd treat Lilyclaw good and with respect, and that she already had two other kits to take care of. She didn't want to be the start of another battle."

"Sparrowheart objected deeply, but he soon he started to accept her wish," Bluewing added.

He looked down to his paws, disbelief swirling in his eyes. *So many things have been hidden from me for all these moons. I wonder why Featherbreeze never told me. Was it because she thought I'd leave MoonClan and join DarkClan?* he thought sadly.

"How many cats know about this?" Icetail murmured.

"Only those old enough to have fought in that battle," said

Sharpfang. He glared up into the sky. "With all these younger warriors, things like this can easily be forgotten. But *I'll* never forget."

Featherbreeze and I are more alike than I ever thought! Icetail looked up at the sky and past the tree branches overhead. *I didn't know that she was so ridden with guilt.*

"I can't believe this," he whispered. "And *I* never knew?"

Sharpfang opened his mouth to speak, but grew silent as his ears pricked forward. Bluewing jolted upright, too. The nearby undergrowth rattled as a newcomer made their way through the forest. Icetail, Sharpfang and Bluewing's eyes snapped in the direction where it came from, immediately growing tense with alert. It didn't sound like there was just one cat approaching. No, there were more!

"Believe it, Icetail," laughed a voice. The cat in the lead emerged through the tangle of bushes. Icetail spotted none other than Dewfang, surrounded by a few other DarkClan cats.

"Why are you here, Dewfang?" Icetail snarled, his fur immediately going on end. His heart pounded with fear. *And where is Sparrowheart?* He caught wind of his father's scent amongst the crowd of trespassers. They must've had him!

"I do not think that a cat like you should speak so rudely to the leader of a Clan," snarled his brother, unsheathing his claws. "I go by the name of Dew*star* now, leader of DarkClan." Icetail's eyes widened. "And I did not come here to fight. I came here to make a proposition."

"What kind of proposition?" growled Sharpfang.

"The other day, I found Sparrowheart walking too close to our borders," Dewfang began. "So my Clanmates captured him, and now, I'd like to return him."

"Then give back our father!" demanded Icetail.

"I'll give him back if you, Icetail, come with us in his place,"

Dewfang meowed. "It's fair, really. You will become a loyal DarkClan prisoner in our camp if you want to save your father."

Icetail was about to speak, until his father and his deputy cut him off.

"Don't do it, Icetail!" choked Sparrowheart. Icetail's eyes trailed the group of cats and found him lying between two of the bigger warriors. His heart broke as he saw Sparrowheart's battered condition. He was all beaten and scratched up, his fur matted with blood. "Please . . . I'd rather *die* than to see my only kit turn away from the warrior code!"

Icetail eyed his father painfully. It hurt to see Sparrowheart so beaten and desperate. Deep down, he knew that Sparrowheart was right. Deep down, fear also rested in his heart. What would Dewfang do if Icetail were to refuse? They were clearly outnumbered, and Sparrowheart was weak.

Oh StarClan! Icetail thought, thinking of ways to scoop his father up and run. *We're too outmatched to back away from this without bloodshed*!

Sparrowheart gravely stared at Icetail as they waited for his response. His father shook his head ever so slightly, his eyes speaking louder than his actions. *Don't do it, Icetail. Know where your loyalties lie*! he seemed to call out to him.

With that, Icetail turned back to Dewfang. "I will not leave my place as a loyal MoonClan warrior," he hissed fiercely. "There is no other Clan in this forest as true or as brave! My heart lives here—filled with heroic cats who'd *never* turn away from the code."

Sparrowheart's eyes filled with happiness, and he cracked a small smile. If Icetail were close enough, he was convinced that he was even purring. "Thank you . . ."

"Kill him," Dewfang ordered. "Kill Sparrowheart!"

Icetail bolted from his spot, but he was stopped by Dewfang's patrol of cats, hissing threateningly for him not to move.

"Don't do it!" Icetail yowled, swiping furiously. Sharpfang and Bluewing raced up to him, holding him back.

"Icetail, we must escape! It's Sparrowheart's will!" Sharpfang hissed in his ear.

Icetail couldn't listen to those words. He struggled to get closer to Sparrowheart. "Dewfang, don't kill our father! Please!"

"I told you once, and I will not tell you again," snarled the DarkClan leader. "My name is not Dewfang anymore. I am Dewstar! *I* decide who dies and who lives! Kill MoonClan's deputy!"

"Yes, Dewstar," hissed a she-cat, padding up to Sparrowheart with barred fangs.

"Icetail, leave me be!" Sparrowheart snapped. "This is not your fault. It was Dewstar . . . not you . . ." And at that instant, the she-cat snapped Sparrowheart's neck with her jaws. Sparrowheart collapsed, dead on the ground with blood pooling around his head.

Icetail let out a yowl of grief. "You'll pay, Dewfang! You'll pay for this!"

"Next time you will be calling me Dewstar," his brother meowed. "Because next time I see you, not only will I lead DarkClan, but I will also be the new leader of MoonClan."

A/N Dun dun dunnnn. Sparrowheart is dead :O AND Icetail finally knows the truth about where he is from and all that crap :D How was this chapter?

Next chapter, some big events will be happening C: stay tuned lol

Chapter Thirty Six

Edited ✔

Icetail watched in horror as his brother left the clearing, his head held high with pride.

Sparrowheart . . . Dewstar killed Sparrowheart . . . he thought, his heart pounding hard in his chest. Right beside him, Bluewing was tense. Sharpfang's eyes were sorrowful. None of them could do anything as the DarkClan cats strolled towards their own border, following their new leader. Icetail could not believe this was happening. *And to think I'm from DarkClan.*

"Murderers," he called after them as the last of their cats disappeared. He clawed the ground in anger and grief, feeling overwhelmingly heavy and hot. *My enemy . . . I know who my enemy is. Dewstar and DarkClan are my enemies. I shall never forgive them. I'll never show them mercy.*

Dewstar killed our own father!

"I'm going to kill him," whispered Icetail, his heart beginning to pound faster. "I'm going to kill him!"

Icetail was about to charge from his spot to go after his brother, but Sharpfang's jaws clamped onto his tail, stopping him. "Don't even think about it," growled the senior warrior. "There was nothing we could do. Nothing we can do until. We must respect Sharpfang's wishes. You can't lose yourself like that."

Even though his teeth dug in to Icetail's tail, it didn't hurt from the rage and grief he felt. He glared at Sharpfang. "B-but he killed my father," the young warrior protested, as if he were a kit again. "I can't let him leave like that!"

"Be thankful that we did not have an unfair battle," whispered Bluewing, staring down at Sparrowheart's poor body. "I feel as

angry as you do. . . but chasing after Dewfang is playing right into his trap. Making a cat's killer instinct snap is just what he wants."

Icetail took a deep breath, imagining the joy on his brother's face when and if he got the chance to sink his claws down his throat, snapping Icetail's neck just as he did to Sharpfang. He cringed, fur bristling as his claws sheathed hesitantly. "Y-you're right. We have to take Sparrowheart back to camp. We must tell Brightstar what happened . . ."

"We must hurry before they come back," Sharpfang murmured, watching the forest as if waiting for the enemy to jump out.

* * *

Soon, Icetail and the others finally returned to camp, his eyes sad and his head hanging. Bluewing and Sharpfang carried Sparrowheart since Icetail felt too pained to even look at his father's corpse. Brightstar instantly sprung from her spot right beside Sagepelt, Nightrose and Silverleaf, and rushed over to where Bluewing and Sharpfang set down the dead deputy in the middle of the camp.

Now all the cats of MoonClan began to crowd. Icetail hated crowds . . . he wished he were anywhere else. He wished he were dead. *Death is peaceful and easy. Life is so much harder than that. I just want StarClan to take me already, why must they watch me suffer?* he thought with grief.

He looked up, and his eyes met with Silverleaf's. She stood on the other side of the crowd, sorrowful blue eyes that were hard to miss. *As long as I live I must look out for my Clanmates*, he realized. *I can't die because of the love I feel for Silverleaf; the love I feel for the entire Clan. I can't let MoonClan suffer!* Icetail knew that following his mother and father to StarClan would leave his loved ones unprotected. Even if he was the day in the prophecy destined to destroy, he couldn't grasp the prospect of leaving them to be destroyed by DarkClan.

Sharpfang quietly told Brightstar and the rest of MoonClan what happened at the border as Icetail left the clearing and slowly

padded to his nest. He buried his face in the soft moss and feathers, blocking out all sounds and sights. He was in no position to face any cat right now. He was too weak from grief to do so.

After a few moments, Brightstar's voice softly rung around the Clan clearing. "Every cat of MoonClan, gather around the Moonrock," she announced. Her voice wasn't as powerful as it always was, containing a hint of grief hidden with resolve.

He couldn't just ignore his leader's command. Icetail clambered out of his spot and padded into the clearing, sitting at the very back of the crowd.

"As we know, tragedies have happened," Brightstar murmured, loud enough for all to hear. Every cat of MoonClan stared up at their leader for hope, silent and still as prey. "Dewfang became the new leader of DarkClan, indicating Sandstar no longer lives. More importantly, we face today the sad death of our loyal deputy, Sparrowheart, who died bravely for the sake of MoonClan's name . . ."

"And the fact that Thornheart is still missing!" called Redsky from the crowd. Her voice was pained; Thornheart was her kit and nobody knew his whereabouts. "DarkClan must have him, we must find him before he dies, too!"

Some cats murmured agreements, while others of disapproval for speaking out.

"I know," Brightstar said, sympathetically meeting her gaze. "We will find him. But as the warrior code says, I must choose a new deputy before moonhigh—and I have made my decision."

Icetail had a feeling that some cat like Sharpfang might become the new deputy. He was loyal and strong and powerful enough in mind to lead MoonClan through this battle. He closed his eyes as he listened to Brightstar make her decision.

"I say this before StarClan, so that our warrior ancestors and that Sparrowheart may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of MoonClan will be Icetail," she said, looking right at his direction.

His eyes opened and widened.

"Icetail! Icetail!" some of his Clanmates chanted, but others were unsure if they should. He was unsure if he should be excited or worried just like his Clanmates.

"M-me?" he stammered. "But I've never even had an apprentice!"

"That's why I will also name the new apprentices of MoonClan," Brightstar went on, "as we need as many assets as we can have for the Clan during these tough times. Goldenkit, Amberkit, Blackkit, please step forward."

Suddenly eager, the three kits stepped into the clearing, looking up at their leader with wide and hopeful eyes. Murmurs rippled through the crowd.

"Amberkit," Brightstar began. "You have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this moment on, you will be known as Amberpaw. Your new mentor will be Icetail, in hopes that he will pass on his fierce desire to serve MoonClan and his will to protect his Clanmates."

"Amberpaw! Amberpaw!" every cat cheered. Even Icetail cheered, though he very surprised. He touched his nose to his new apprentice, knowing it was a custom and that he could not ignore.

Now that things are changing, I'm the new MoonClan deputy with my very own apprentice! he thought with shock. *Why is Brightstar doing this*?

Next, Blackkit got his apprentice name, Blackpaw, and Volefur became his mentor. Last, Goldenkit became Goldenpaw, with Dawnstripe as a mentor. Their names were cheered loudly. As the cheering died down, Brightstar continued her speech with solemn eyes.

"Through Sparrowheart's sad death, we will see MoonClan through better days," she meowed. "Along with new apprentices, we will also receive new kits in due time. Sagepelt has announced that she is expecting Sharpfang's kits, and will move into the nursery."

Sagepelt smiled amongst the cats of MoonClan as they congratulated her.

Icetail stood there in disbelief, glancing over at his father's corpse as the Clan buzzed with new events. *Me, as deputy*? The thought made his belly lift, and he didn't feel hungry anymore. He padded over to Brightstar once she concluded the meeting and leaped off of her den.

"Me?" Icetail asked, astonished. "Why me?"

"Because, my apprentice," Brightstar meowed, "I see how you work for MoonClan. You put your heart and soul into it . . . you never stop working even when you are tired and even where you are weary. You are always looking after everyone even if you don't realize it. Besides, you're always risking your life for your Clanmates. Whether it'd be stupidity or actual bravery, we need more of that in MoonClan." Icetail looked down to his paws. "Go now. You must assign patrols and start training your new apprentice. We need every cat in MoonClan tonight to honor the death of your father."

"Aren't you upset about his death?" murmured Icetail. "I feel as if another part of me has left."

"I am as upset as you, Icetail. But you once told me not long ago that you have to be strong for your Clanmates. That's what I am doing right now," she explained gently. "Go now. I'll have Sweetheart and the elders prepare him for his burial."

Icetail sighed and nodded, leaving Brightstar be. *I don't know if I can do this*, he thought, *but I'll try*. Every cat grew silent as he raised his head, glancing around at his comrades. Their eyes gleamed with newfound hope as he took a deep breath, tail-tip twitching nervously. Most of his Clanmates seemed to have confidence in him. *So I must have confidence in myself, too*.

"As the new deputy of MoonClan, I need to assign patrols," he announced, raising his voice as high as he could.

Ashtail looked up in pride at Icetail, and so did his friends. Other

cats seemed curious, others looked doubtful.

"For the DarkClan border patrol, I will send Sharpfang, Shadowheart, Crowflight and Adderclaw to strengthen the borders. Don't engage with any of Dewstar's cats," he ordered. "Sharpfang will lead you. If you see DarkClan cats on our territory, try and return to MoonClan as quick as you can and take any reinforcements with you if necessary."

Sharpfang gave a sharp nod, understanding the situation clearly. Not too long ago they were walking through MoonClan territory. For all they knew, they could still be around and could engage in battle. More bloodshed was the one thing Icetail wanted to avoid.

"Dawnstripe will lead a patrol to MarshClan with Graywing and Sedgetooth, and Goldenpaw," he continued.

The new apprentice squealed with excitement. "My first time out of camp will be put to use in a patrol!" she exclaimed.

"Lucky!" said Blackpaw in a whine.

Amberpaw was looking up, watching with curiosity in silence.

"CloudClan's patrol will be lead by Fireshade; Squirreltail and Flameheart will go with him. Lastly, StreamClan's patrol will be lead by Rosepetal. Petalwing and Swiftbreeze will go along with you. Make sure to hunt upon your return."

Every patrol began to gather and leave. Brightstar padded up and put a tail around his shoulder. "Good job," she whispered in his ear. "Now you need to go to Amberpaw."

Icetail jolted upward, remembering that his duties were not finished yet. *I have an apprentice!* he thought, glancing over at her. She waited patiently for his instruction. "Right. Thank you, Brightstar," he said, dipping his head to the Clan leader. "I won't let you down."

She gave a warm smile before turning to Sparrowheart, padding over to his body. The elders and medicine cat were already paying their respects, rubbing herbs over his battered wounds as they smoothened out his fur. Icetail stared one last time at his father

before taking a gulp of air, turning around in the direction of his apprentice. He met with her and she stood up eagerly.

"So," he meowed, "what do you want to do most?"

"What do you mean?" asked Amberpaw.

"You know, either hunting, exploring or battle training," Icetail explained, remembering when he was an apprentice. "I want to leave it up to you so you can choose anything you'd most prefer."

"I want to explore!" Amberpaw suddenly exclaimed. "I can't believe I became the deputy's first apprentice. That's so amazing . . ."

Shiningmoon padded up to the two, dipping her head with respect. "Congratulations on the new title, deputy." Her words were bright as she looked back up, meeting his gaze. "And I'm sorry about Sparrowheart. I would be just as devastated if my brother died, since he's missing . . ."

Icetail knew she was referring to Thornheart. He sighed.

"Thank you, and we will find him soon," Icetail reassured, touching noses with her. "Amberpaw, let's go. The sooner we start, the earlier we can get back to camp to honor Sparrowheart."

"Alright," said Amberpaw as she made her way to the camp entrance. "Let's go!"

Icetail nodded. "Goodbye, Shiningmoon."

"Bye Icetail," Shiningmoon meowed back.

Icetail padded after Amberpaw, but instantly, Silverleaf had stopped him as well. His heart pounded faster, and he felt something he had never felt before for the she-cat. "Can I come with you two?" Silverleaf asked. "It won't be smart for just a patrol of two to be out."

"Sure," Icetail said. "I don't know where we'll be going yet. Perhaps just a tour of MoonClan."

"Okay," said Silverleaf, padding up to Amberpaw. "Hey, are you excited to be an apprentice now?" she asked Amberpaw. "I felt the same way a long time ago."

"Super excited!" exlaimed Amberpaw.

Icetail mustered up a purr, remembering how it was like when he was young too. "Let's go. And let's return back before the moon has risen, to honor Sparrowheart in the name of MoonClan."

"That sounds nice," said Silverleaf, resting her tail onto his spine.

As the patrol left the camp, Amberpaw bounced with excitement. She looking around swiftly and eagerly, admiring every tree and plant she laid her eyes on. They padded on through the forest, taking in the sights and smells as they explained which directions each territory resided, and where certain important landmarks were. As he spoke, everything had has happened in the past few moons kept to the back of his mind; his past, his roots, his brother . . . he thought about Sparrowheart, and what his reunion with Featherbreeze was like.

As he took in MoonClan's forest yet again, he felt grateful for Sharpfang for keeping him sane as events unfolded earlier on.

Dewfang, now Dewstar, still made his heart stir, but not as strongly as when the two faced each other. *I can't believe he's a leader now,* thought Icetail. *Does this mean that he will truly become the cat who leads in the prophecy. Will Dewstar lead the Clans, and I destroy them?*

He kept on thinking as he lead the patrol, shifting his gaze from the trees to his new apprentice.

The forest's green had gone completely, replaced by various shades of orange, yellow leaves. The leaves littered the ground, sweeping up in the cool breeze before gently twirling to the forest floor. Amberpaw squealed with excitement as she stomped on the dead leaves, seeming to love the sound and feeling of crunching underneath her paws. She and Silverleaf began pouncing at every leaf that fell, but Icetail remained in posture, padding through MoonClan's territory gracefully and quietly.

They were headed towards StreamClan, and Icetail decided to show her the cave of mosses—but not from the inside after the incident that happened. It could still be dangerous.

"Follow me, Amberpaw," said Icetail, leading her in the direction of the cave. He wondered if it was completely destroyed from the rain water, but A part of him felt that it was impossible. The cave stood strong for many, many seasons, for much longer than Icetail had lived or even Brightstar had lived. This couldn't of possibly been the worst storm that had struck it, right?

On the meadow-like area, Icetail's eyes widened as he spotted the cave, crumbled and destroyed completely. Impossible! He ran from his spot and approached it as fast as his paws could take him.

"Wait, Icetail!" Silverleaf called.

He heard the two she-cats run after him. Silverleaf seemed clearly shocked as well, but Amberpaw's expression was slightly amazed.

Icetail stood in front of the broken cave, his legs trembling. Silverleaf pressed closer to him.

"There have been worse storms before, right?" she whispered, her eyes wide.

As they observed the wreckage, a terrible scent caught into Icetail's nose and throat. The others could smell it too.

"What is this stench?" exclaimed Amberpaw with disgust.

He immediately knew what it was. "This wasn't the work of rainwater. Deep underground, when Squirreltail, Sharpfang and I explored a hole that surfaced on the territory, we found Twolegs constructing something deep underground. They're using monster-like things that let out smoke. I didn't think that the monsters and Twolegs would get the cave of mosses, too . . ."

"We shouldn't be here," declared Silverleaf. "I think we should tell Brightstar about this."

"You're right. But first we have to finish our adventure. Right,

Amberpaw?" He looked down to his apprentice.

"Right, Icetail," said Amberpaw cheekily.

How can she be so bright on such sad days? Icetail thought with wonder.

Chapter Thirty Seven

Edited ✔

This chapter is the moment everyone has been waiting for. Contains a little bit of loooove~
-_^ enjoy

Icetail padded beside Silverleaf as Amberpaw lead the way back to camp. They finished exploring two more places; near MarshClan's borders and near CloudClan's moors. Icetail knew that he'd have to show her near the borders of DarkClan too, but he decided he'd give it another quarter-moon so he'd know that Amberpaw would at least be able to defend herself if Dewstar's warriors tried anything bad. This made him think of when he was an apprentice. There used to be a lot of battles back then, but the numbers were ever increasing.

Icetail thought for a moment, before telling Amberpaw: "You can go ahead to camp if you want," he offered. "I'd like to see if you know the way back."

"Of course I know the way back!" said Amberpaw. "Why do you want to send me back to camp before you anyway?" She was dumbstruck for a moment before looking back and forth between Silverleaf and Icetail. "Oh. Alright, I'll go back."

She began to run in the right direction, her tail flicking with delight. Icetail just sighed, a bit embarrassed. *She figures everything out*, he thought. He turned to Silverleaf, but she was as clueless as a kit.

"Why'd you send her back?" laughed the silver she-cat. "Amberpaw could be mauled by a fox for all I know."

Icetail shook his head. "We're not that far from camp," he pointed out. "Besides, Amberpaw, I know you're hiding in the bushes." He flicked his ear towards patches of dying holly. Amberpaw's head

poked out from her hiding spot, and she looked frustrated. "Go back to camp, Amberpaw."

"Come on," she whined. "I didn't think you'd scent me that fast."

"I bet he didn't scent you. He probably heard you step on a leaf or something," Silverleaf pointed out, remembering that he had better hearing than he did scent. "Anyways, you should get back. We'll catch up to you in a few moments."

"Fine," Amberpaw groaned. The ginger apprentice began to leave, padding through the undergrowth. Icetail listened until she was finally gone, feeling relief when they were finally alone.

"Okay, continuing," Silverleaf meowed, glancing at Icetail. "There must of been a reason other than to test her."

"There is," said Icetail, the tip of his ears becoming hot. "I just didn't want any kits lurking around or anything. That'd be rather uncomfortable."

"She's an apprentice," Silverleaf pointed out. "Not a kit. I bet she'd get mad if she found out that you called her that." Icetail nodded with agreement. A leaf drifted onto Silverleaf's head, crackling into a bunch of tiny pieces over her fur. "What was that?" she asked, ears twitching with alarm.

"You're covered in leaves!" he explained, letting out a small *mrrow* of laughter. "Here, let me help you get it off." He stepped forward and groomed her soft fur clean, smoothening it out before observing her. "It really looks like there are stars in your fur . . ." he purred.

"Or maybe you're slowly going to StarClan," Silverleaf joked.

"I'll take you with me," Icetail said before continuing to clean the leaves off of her fur.

Silverleaf shoved him onto the forest ground and pinned him down. "You won't take me to StarClan—not as long as I can help it!" She kept him pinned, and Icetail couldn't help but but to let out another *mrrow* of laugher. "What? What's so funny!"

"I can easily knock you off your paws," he meowed.

"No you can't."

"Of course I can," he said. "I've been in far more battles than you have." He kicked her over, and then pinned her down before she could even struggle. "See?" Silverleaf tried to kick him off with her back paws, but it was no use. She wouldn't dare unsheathe her claws, so she couldn't even land a scratch to free herself. Icetail smirked playfully.

Silverleaf rolled her eyes. "Get off me you stupid furball," she meowed. Icetail wouldn't let her up, and she sighed. But a moment later, her expression changed. "Hey, thank you, Icetail." Her voice was softer than before.

Icetail tilted his head. "For what?"

"For everything," Silverleaf said. "When I was a kit and I lost Ripplefur, you were basically my mother." Icetail snorted. "It's true! And when DarkClan took me when I was still a kit, you were the first cat I expected to see steal me back—and I was right. Thanks for saving me . . . all those other times too," she went on.

Icetail knew she was talking about both the falling branch incident, and the from Dewstar a couple moons ago when she was still an apprentice. These incidents almost had cost him his life as much as it did to her, allowing him to escape with nothing but a scar on his shoulder.

His face softened. "I told you I'd protect you forever," he mewed. He touched his nose to hers and closed his eyes. "And you'll protect me too, right?"

"Y-yeah," Silverleaf stammered, embarrassed. "You're too much of a reckless furball."

"I've heard that so much that I'm already used to it," Icetail said, amused.

He opened his eyes and stared at Silverleaf in amazement and surprise. He didn't expect to feel so happy especially after the death

of his father. But when Silverleaf was around, he felt like he could be or do anything he wanted. The effect that she had on him made his heart flutter with feelings he didn't know he could ever have.

"Silverleaf," Icetail murmured. "I love you."

Her tail entwined with his. "I love you too, Icetail." He let her up, and she shook the dirt from her pelt. "Thank you for always being there for me. I love you so much."

Icetail pressed his pelt against hers' and purred. "You've always made me feel that I could be a better cat." He paused for a moment. "In the future, we'll have kits, Silverleaf, and we'd grow to be elders together, too . . ."

"You love thinking about the future," she said amused. "I don't think I want *that* many kits." He could feel her heart pounding fast.

For a few moments, they both sat together basking in the brief peace—Silverleaf with her head in his chest, as if she was trying to listen to his heartbeat, and Icetail, pressing close to her warm fur.

"I really want to stay like this for a long time," sighed Icetail.

"Too bad we have to go back to camp," murmured Silverleaf. Icetail nodded, but he did not move his spot. "The sun is setting," Silverleaf went on, pointing to the sky with her ears. "We have to go now. For Sparrowheart."

He licked her between her ears, knowing that she was right. He was happy right now . . . He hasn't been this close to Silverleaf in moons. "We can leave when you'd like, before the moon rises."

"Just a little while longer," she mewed quietly. "Your fur is so warm, I don't want to move."

"Your's too."

For moments longer, they talked as they remained together. When the sun was barely over the horizon, they both decided to go back in time Sparrowheart's vigil. She led him in the camp, and no cat seemed to notice that they were even gone except for Brightstar and

Amberpaw.

Brightstar immediately padded up to him. Her gray fur rippled over the movement of her muscles, and her short tail flicked. "Welcome back, Icetail," she meowed. "Where were you?" She turned to Icetail's mate, and curiosity sparked her eyes. "Out with Silverleaf, I suppose?" She was smiling teasingly.

Amberpaw opened her mouth to probably say something that Icetail didn't want to hear, so he answered before she could. "The moon is about to rise. Is everyone back at camp?" He had completely changed the subject, not wanting to share any of what happened.

What happens between us is between us, he decided. He'd never liked gossip anyway. Silverleaf must of picked up what Icetail was thinking and remained by his side without saying a word. She pressed closer to Icetail.

"You were the last to return," meowed Brightstar. She gave a deep sigh. "And you should come to my den, too. There's someone who you should see, as my deputy."

Icetail nodded and touched Silverleaf's nose with his. "I'll be right back," he promised.

All that was in Icetail's mind was Silverleaf as he followed his leader to her den. Brightstar gestured inside, and Icetail went. The first thing he saw was Thornheart, standing right beside Sweetheart.

His thoughts faded away and his eyes widened, fur going on end. "Where were you?" he demanded to the younger warrior. "If DarkClan hadn't taken you, where could you have possible been all this time?"

Thornheart's head hung with shame. "I'm sorry, Icetail."

"Brightstar, where was he?" Icetail asked, turning to his leader.

Sweetfur answered for her. "Thornheart was sneaking away," responded the MoonClan medicine cat. "He was meeting with a StreamClan she-cat. You won't believe what we had found there."

"What?" Icetail asked.

"Tell him, Thornheart," snarled Sweetheart.

Thonheart's eyes were on his paws. "I-I had kits . . . with the StreamClan warrior," he mewed with shame. "I was out with her, looking after them just for a few days, until I was found and taken back here."

That's breaking the warrior code! he thought, his fur still on end. He felt especially disturbed for the fact that he was only a young warrior. He hadn't been named Thornheart for more than two moons! He didn't know that the young tom was capable of disrespecting the code so quick in his life.

"What are we going to do about this, Brightstar?" Icetail asked, turning to his leader. They couldn't be distracted from Sparrowheart's vigil that night.

"Lower your voice," scolded Brightstar. "Not everyone knows what happened. Only the warriors who were out on the search patrol know."

"Well, whatever this is about, we can't ignore it," murmured Icetail. "Where is the queen right now?"

"She's nursing the kits in the nursery," responded Sweetheart. "She only had two, so we thought that it wouldn't crowd Sagepelt."

Icetail's eyes met with his leader's. "I'm sorry, Brightstar," he said with a sigh. "Today is not about figuring things out with a StreamClan queen. Right now, we have to honor Sparrowheart. The moon is already coming up. Can we figure this out tomorrow?"

Brightstar nodded. "As you wish."

* * *

Icetail's nose was touching his father's dead body. For some reason, when he didn't think about Sparrowheart earlier, he felt at ease. But now, as he remained with Sparrowheart's corpse, his heart felt heavy again.

His father's gray fur shimmered lightly under the moonlight, and Icetail grieved. *I've lost all my family in MoonClan,* he thought, pain gripping his chest. He knew that he had a sister somewhere in DarkClan, and that Flameheart's mother was his own mother's sister, but even so, the pain of loosing the cats he grew up with was unbearable.

He buried his head in his father's fur, not wanting to move. There was no warmth in the air, neither in the dead deputy's body.

He could hear the soft mews of the kits in the nursery. The StreamClan she-cat was talking softly to Sagepelt. She must of felt worse than Thornheart. Being away from your birth Clan was just as terrible as losing a cat you loved. He pressed closer to Sparrowheart.

Are you watching over me now? he thought. *Are you right beside Featherbreeze, looking over MoonClan and protecting us?* The moon was at it's highest peak in the sky, surrounded by countless of bright stars. He parted from his father and looked up at the sky in wonder. Silverpelt was shining as bright as ever. He knew deep down that Sparrowheart was a star among them, close to the moon with the rest of his Clanmates that had ever passed.

He felt a tail softly rest over his spine, and he turned to see Silverleaf standing close by, her eyes watching Sparrowheart with grief and sympathy. Icetail smiled gratefully towards her. *That's right. We're mates now; everything we do is shared in between the two of us.*

"It's time for the elders to bury him," she meowed softly. "Look."

She pointed to Thrushclaw and Stripeeyes, who were both padding over. Right beside them was Mousetail and Sweetheart. They must be on the way to help the two elders. He dipped his head in respect to them before padding to the warriors den. Silverleaf followed quietly behind.

Everyone in the den looked as if they were sleeping, but he knew deep down that most of them were faking it. Just like him, they were all trying to get over the loss of the previous deputy. He lied

down in his nest, and Silverleaf cuddled up beside him. He was grateful to her warmth.

He knew that tonight was not going to be so restful.

* * *

Icetail hadn't dreamed in a long time up until now. He was padding through a forest of lush green, and the air smelled like a combination of oak and pine. He knew that he was in the forest of MoonClan. Just up ahead, he could see the camp. Everything was the same, yet so different.

He padded through the entrance, expecting to be greeted by his Clanmates, but no cat took notice of him. Icetail saw some cats he did not recognize, and some cats that he knew for a very long time. He gazed at the nursery, and his eyes widened at what he saw.

Featherbreeze was within the den, cradling three new-born kits. He realized at that moment that he was only looking at the past. He walked up to his mother, and looked down at the kits. Two of them were pawing at each other angrily.

"Dewkit, Icekit, stop," Featherbreeze growled.

Icetail immediately realized that he was looking at himself and his brother. He didn't recognize himself at first because he looked so . . . *little*. Even Dewkit looked different.

"You two should try and be more like your sister. Honestly," she went on with a sigh, "all you two do is fight. Lilykit is so peaceful unlike the both of you."

Icekit smiled as he saw Lilykit. Her fur was darker than Dewkit's but lighter than Icekit's, and she had faint dark gray tabby marks covering her pelt. She was very beautiful.

Why am I looking at such memories? he thought. *These memories are not even mine.* He couldn't have been aware of his surroundings as a newborn kit.

He sighed. This memory was so peaceful, he could live here forever.

Suddenly, the MoonClan camp disappeared, and Icetail reappeared in a moon-bathed clearing. He looked around swiftly. "Now where am I?" he asked out loud.

"You're in StarClan," responded a cat who was all too familiar.

Icetail's paws trembled, and his eyes were wide. He turned swiftly and saw Featherbreeze, looking as beautiful as ever. He hadn't seen his mother ever since she had died. He felt weak as if he couldn't stand. Looking at her in a memory was not the same, but talking face-to-face . . . that was completely different. He could barely believe his eyes.

"I was showing you my memories," Featherbreeze went on. "That was the happiest moment of my life; it was peaceful and calm. It was a moment in time right before DarkClan had attacked us for my kits."

"Why did you show me that memory?" he whispered.

Featherbreeze approaches, touching her nose to his. He accepted her warmth that he missed all too much. "Because, my son, I wanted to remind you that in the midst of a war, you can find and make peace. I wanted to tell you that hatred is not the answer to everything. Even in the midst of a battle, we must all remember one thing."

"What must we remember?" Icetail asked.

"We must not become a monster in order to defeat a monster." Featherbreeze's eyes blazed. "You can never forget that, Icetail."

Chapter Thirty Eight

Edited ✔

H i : D new chapter. So anyways, don't be confused on who Mistyleaf is. She is the StreamClan queen that was mentioned in the previous chapter. On to the story!

As usual, Icetail kept quiet about his dream the next day. Brightstar woke him up early, just at the peak of dawn. Yesterday, the night was all about Sparrowheart, but today, the Mistyleaf and Thornheart's problem was to be situated. He could tell by the way Brightstar looked at the two.

They gathered up in the leader's den with Sharpfang there as well. Thornheart sat behind the warriors, shame radiating off his pelt from Brightstar's lecture. Icetail felt bad, but he had to remind himself that Thornheart broke the warrior code, and matters like this could not be taken lightly.

Brightstar sighed and sat down on her nest, letting her tail rest to the side. "I need everyone's thoughts and opinions about Mistyleaf," she began. "By far, all we know is that she's from StreamClan. She didn't tell me if she ran away for good, or if it was just brief. All I know is they're probably missing her as much as we missed Thornheart."

Deep down, Icetail wasn't all-too drawn to this topic of conversation. All he could think about were the words Featherbreeze's calm and gentle voice had told him in his dream: *We must not become a monster in order to defeat a monster.*

"If she won't tell us, I think we should go to Lakestar and speak with him personally," said Sharpfang, not realizing that Icetail wasn't paying too much attention. "Her Clanmates most likely don't know where she could've went."

"That's true enough," Brightstar murmured. "Icetail, any thoughts or

opinions?"

He immediately looked up. "What?" He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Brightstar. There was something in my mind." As his voice trailed off, he felt guilty for not listening too much.

"We were talking about what we should to with the queen," Brightstar explained, not seeming to mind at all. "You're good with ideas. Perhaps you have something on your mind about it?"

Icetail shrugged. "Well, if you don't mind then. I was thinking that we should meet with Lakestar and his deputy later at sunhigh by the borders. We could take Thornheart and Mistyleaf with us, and we can talk there. Things could be discussed easiest that way." He looked back and forth between his leader and Sharpfang. "Is this idea good enough?"

"That sounds fine," Brightstar meowed. "Sharpfang?"

"Sure. It won't hurt to try," Sharpfang responded.

"Okay," Icetail said. "We must choose two cats to pass on the message."

"Then the plan is settled," meowed MoonClan's leader. Her short tail flicked. "Get right on that, Sharpfang. And Icetail, everyone is waking up by now. It might be a good time to start sending out patrols."

"Yes, Brightstar," Icetail said.

* * *

After Icetail was done sending out all the borders patrols and hunting patrols for the morning, he decided that he would teach Amberpaw how to hunt before sunhigh came. He gathered up his own hunting patrol, taking Flameheart and Nightrose along with him, and went by the CloudClan borders.

He remembered the battle that happened here long ago between DarkClan, CloudClan and MoonClan when he finally made it to his destination. Even though it was a bad memory, he couldn't help but

recall how terrible he and Sharpfang used to act towards each other.

Amberpaw eagerly ran up to Icetail, catching him from his thoughts. "What are you going to teach me today?" she meowed eagerly. "Catching rabbits? Squirrels? Birds?"

"We'll start with something easy," said Icetail, amused at how many difficult pieces of prey she was willing to chase. "First, show me your best hunter's crouch."

"Like this!" Amberpaw said, bending low to the ground. Her tail was draped on the grass, but she was almost perfect.

"You look good," he commented. "How did you learn this move? I don't remember ever teaching it to you."

"You *did* teach it to me!" exclaimed the eager apprentice. "I was still a kit when you showed me. I've practiced it ever since." Her tail lashed eagerly, and her young eyes were bright.

Icetail nodded. "You're good on the move. Just sink a little lower to the ground, and keep your tail balanced with your body so it won't drag on the forest floor. This way, you'll barely make any sounds. Got it?"

"I got it," Amberpaw said. She crouched down lower and raised her tail a little higher so it was balanced just as he advised. Icetail saw how well she looked—he knew that she would become a great hunter one day. Not only did she listen well to instructions, but she also had a spectacular memory.

He looked up and scented the air, catching wind of a few mice hiding by one of the trees nearby. He decided to let her test it out. "Try and scenting your surrounding," he advised in a low voice. "Pay close attention to everything that's around you. Don't make a single sound."

Amberpaw nodded and looked up, scenting the air. She closed her eyes as she tried to make out what was around her. Icetail was proud of her. He could see by her expression that she had caught

the smell of the mice, even though she didn't start to follow it. Flameheart stalked off somewhere else, scenting some different prey, and Nightrose followed him, knowing that it was best to leave Icetail alone with his new apprentice.

Amberpaw didn't notice them leave, as she was too focused on trying to scent prey. But finally, her face brightened up, and she turned to Icetail. "I think I found it," she whispered. "It smells like a mouse."

"Good job," praised Icetail with a matching tone. "Now, be very careful. I want you to go and stalk these mice, and then catch them. But you have to be quiet, and remain downwind of them. They can't scent you because the wind is blowing in our direction, but if you go ahead of them, then they will know you are here."

Amberpaw nodded, understanding his instructions clearly. She crept low on the ground, and Icetail stepped a few paces behind to see how she would apply his instructions.

He watched as the ginger she-cat followed the scent of mice carefully. She was a little sloppy and unbalanced as she walked, but he knew that was only normal. He was just as clumsy as she was when he was a new apprentice.

Her muscles rippled under her fur, making her look like a pond of ginger. Amberpaw was getting closer to the mouse den, and she seemed to be getting more eager. He was hoping that she wouldn't loose her posture just yet. If she did, she would mess up the leap and the mice would get away.

I just have to remain patient with her, he reminded himself. *Ashtail and Brightstar were always paitent with me.* He kept on watching her, hoping for the best.

Finally, she reached the mouse den, and Icetail noticed that she was crouching behind a tall patch of grass, watching two of the mice as they ate nuts and seeds. Then, she pounced, immediately chomping down on one of the mice, and her paw landed on the other, crushing the life out of it.

Proudly, she returned to Icetail with the two mice hanging from her jaws. "I did it!" she exclaimed as she dropped them at his paws. "I thought that I would only catch one, but I got them both!"

"That was pretty smart," Icetail commented. "You used both claws *and* teeth."

"Stepping on it was only an accident. But I still caught it! I can't wait to show Nightrose!" She was looking down at her first catches with pride.

"I saw what you did," Nightrose purred, emerging from the undergrowth. "I'm so proud of you! My kits are growing up so fast."

Icetail smiled, and then looked up to the sky. It was almost sunhigh, so pretty soon, he would have to leave with Brightstar, Thornheart, his mate and kits to meet the StreamClan leader and deputy by the borders.

He decided that he would go off hunting on his own. He knew that Amberpaw was familiar with the basics in hunting now, and that she'd be with Nightrose in case she needed more assistance. *Everything will be fine. I'll just catch a piece of prey before I go,* he decided.

* * *

Icetail caught a squirrel that had almost escaped his grip by the time he decided to go back. Amberpaw remained with her two mice, admitting to Icetail that she couldn't catch anything else. Flameheart returned with a starling and vole, and Nightrose carried a mouse and thrush.

He felt proud that his had caught so much prey for the Clan to eat. Leaf-bare was only a few quarter-moons away, and the cold weather would hit at any time. The Clan had to stock up on as much food as they possibly could get their paws on before it all disappeared.

He lead his patrol through the forest, quiet during the whole trip back to camp. As soon as they returned, he could see that most of the patrols had returned as well. Silverleaf was talking quietly with

her brother, Squirreltail. As soon as he dropped his prey on the pile, his mate emerged and touched noses with him.

"Welcome back, Icetail," she purred. Her fur was neatly groomed, but she looked a bit cold from the wind as much as she tried to hide it.

"Hi, Silverleaf," he responded. "How was patrolling at DarkClan? Dewstar didn't stir up more trouble, did he?" He pressed close to her to warm her up, and she gratefully smiled.

"Not at all," Silverleaf responded, shaking her head. "We saw his warriors but we didn't let them see us. We completely avoided them."

"That's good to hear," he said. "Amberpaw was getting good along with hunting. Prey near CloudClan seemed more lively today than before." He felt proud of teaching his apprentice well on their first hunt practice.

"I'll keep that in mind," she mewed.

Bluewing and Grayfur padded up. "You two seem close," commented Grayfur.

Icetail felt warm inside as he explained that they were now mates. That precious day was still fresh in his memory . . . and his heart swelled with happiness because of her, helping him through the pain of his dead father. Her presence had always been a great comfort, and he was grateful to have her.

"Finally, Icetail," Bluewing said with a *mrrow* of laugher. "The younger she-cats were starting to set their eyes on you. You really needed a mate, you'll get old sooner or later like the rest of us."

"I can't tell if you're joking," Icetail meowed with a roll of his eyes.

Grayfur chose a squirrel from the fresh-kill pile, tail flicking with amusement. "When do you two plan on having kits?"

"Why does everyone keep asking me that?" murmured Silverleaf, her ears getting hot. When she got embarrassed, he felt compelled

to tease her.

"As soon as possible," he said. "Obviously."

"Icetail!" Silverleaf exclaimed, shoving him to the side.

"Time to go, Icetail!" Brightstar called to him from the entrance of the camp.

Icetail smiled to the she-cats once more. "I must go now." He turned, and called over his shoulder, "We'll continue this after I get back!" Then, he left, following Brightstar as she led him out of camp, followed by Mintyleaf—the she-cat queen—Thornheart, who each carried a small kit in their jaws.

He ignored the she-cats laughing and talking in the background as he left with the patrol. *I have to become serious now,* he thought. *Meeting cats from another Clan . . . that actually is scary. I'll have to be mature so they don't think that I am making a fool out of myself. That would just put shame on MoonClan.*

He held his head high as he continued walking at the back of the patrol, making sure that neither Thornheart nor the StreamClan warrior would stray off. As he watched, he actually wondered what it was like to have kits. He had never thought about it until now. He'd always liked their presence, but couldn't imagine himself as a father so soon.

His tail flicked in wonder as the patrol advanced through the forest. *I wonder what they would look like,* he thought, *or what they would sound like or how many there'd be?*

"Icetail," Brightstar meowed. "Get out of your daze and come over here."

Icetail padded over to her and dipped his head with respect. "Yes, Brightstar?" he asked, a little embarrassed for not being focused.

"Lead the patrol up front now," she ordered. "I'll take rear. I want to speak to Thornheart."

Icetail nodded and began to lead up front. He watched as Brightstar

padded over to Thornheart, beginning to murmur in his ear. He didn't have super-hearing or anything so he couldn't make out what they were saying, but he guessed that she was asking him questions about the kits and the StreamClan cat.

He sighed and fixed his gaze ahead, watching his paw-steps as he walked. He heard Mistyleaf's kits meow for milk, and she hushed them quietly. He hadn't really heard her speak until now. Was she scared being in MoonClan? Did she miss StreamClan?

Icetail kept on leading them, the scent of the StreamClan borders becoming clear to his nose. Right ahead, he could already spot Lakestar waiting impatiently with his deputy, Moleheart. Icetail already felt a bit agitated from their conduct but he took a deep breath and preceded anyways.

"Greetings Brightstar," said Lakestar, glaring at the MoonClan leader.

Brightstar narrowed her eyes as well. "Hello to you too," she murmured. "I'm glad you came like I requested. There's no other warriors of yours lurking around, are there?" she asked cautiously. "I had only expected you and your deputy."

"There is no cat," responded Moleheart.

Icetail's ears flicked, and he heard rustles in the bushes nearby across the border. He growled, "I hear some cats over there." He angled his ears over to the little undergrowth in StreamClan's border. "You're lying."

Moleheart growled. "How dare you accuse us!"

Lakestar rest his tail over his deputy's shoulders. "Calm down. It's okay, Moleheart," he meowed. "Warriors, you may go back to camp. We don't need you here."

Icetail watched as a couple cats padded out from cover. He easily had spotted them because they weren't good at hiding in the undergrowth. Brightstar stood right beside him. "Why did you bring them?" she asked. "Surely you didn't think that we were going to

ambush you!"

"I had no choice," snapped Lakestar as the cats filed away. "I never know when it's safe anymore, all thanks to DarkClan." He turned to Icetail. "Besides, you asked for us leaders and deputies to meet---and yet you brought a warrior."

"Icetail is MoonClan's new deputy," responded Brightstar harshly, standing up taller. "My old deputy passed on to StarClan."

Moleheart sighed. "Sorry for your loss. But Mistyleaf, we must get back to camp. And bring your kits too. We can't spend too much time here, the Clan needs us."

"I can't leave!" Mistyleaf gasped. "Really, I can't. What about Thornheart?"

"Who?" Moleheart asked.

"Her mate," responded Icetail, signaling to the MoonClan warrior. "She's the father of her kits." He stared at Moleheart's and Lakestar's shocked expressions. "That is why we brought you here. Surely you noticed?"

"But it's against the warrior code!" growled Moleheart. "This can't be true, right Mistyleaf?"

Lakestar hushed him. The tension was large between all of the cats —Icetail was far from comfortable. "We came here to resolve things, right? They can't go on without punishment. But I think that *they* should choose the destiny of their kits, not us." He was staring directly at Thornheart. "Well, MoonClan warrior? What do you choose?"

"I want them to grow up with both their parents," said Thornheart fiercely. "No cat has the right to stop this wish. And I'm sure Mistyleaf doesn't want to leave her kits either; we'll have to be together."

"Then one of you is going to have to give up their current home-Clan," Lakestar meowed. "Thornheart might have to leave MoonClan and come to StreamClan, or the other way around with

Mistyleaf."

Icetail's eyes widened. "You'll do that so easily?"

Lakestar shrugged. "I don't have the right to say no. StarClan will punish these two accordingly, and it's not my place to humiliate them." He stared at the couple, his gaze cold. Icetail wondered why he spoke so dryly.

"I'll . . . go to StreamClan," said Thornheart. "They'll be raised where their mother feels comfortable."

"Are you sure, Thornheart?" Brightstar asked him. "Once you leave, I'm sure that I won't accept you back. Is Mistyleaf really worth leaving your Clan and your family?"

Thornheart nodded slowly. "Yes, she is."

Icestar couldn't imagine being so disloyal to MoonClan that he'd have to turn his back on it.

"Fine then," Lakestar said. "Thornheart, Mistyleaf, come. We are going back to camp."

Chapter Thirty Nine

Edited ✔

The next morning, Icetail woke groggily from his nest, knowing that he had to assign patrols. He was already used to it because he was a fast learner, but he was exhausted from being one of the first cats to wake up early every single day. He waited in the clearing for his Clanmates to stir, grooming his pelt from moss and feathers as he waited.

When every cat was awake, he began sorting the hunting and border patrols. He decided to lead his own patrol, too, with Dawnstripe, her apprentice Goldenpaw, Redsky and Icetail's apprentice, Amberpaw.

Brightstar padded up, her eyes curious. "Would you mind if I came along on your patrol?"

"Oh, sure Brightstar," Icetail responded. "Would you like to lead it? I mean—since you're the Clan leader."

"You may lead it," Brightstar meowed.

"Thank you," he purred, feeling proud to be in charge of his leader. He lead his cats out of the entrance of the camp, with Dawnstripe following close by. The day was pale, cold and dull, with multiple light gray clouds lining sky that covered the sun. The tips of the trees were outlined from with light, and the ground was dampened with morning dew.

Icetail could tell that it had rained at some point during the night because of the scent of smell of salt and the moist dirt underpaw. The scents of the forest prey had been washed away, and the usual annoying birds that regularly chirped in the trees weren't singing their songs that morning, as if hiding in their trees.

He was taking his patrol over to CloudClan, wondering how things

were going on around that side of the territory. He knew that the cave of mosses was already destroyed and that he couldn't cross the border, but he secretly hoped that he'd run into a CloudClan patrol. He wanted to ask them if they were having any troubles with DarkClan recently to know what to expect.

Dawnstripe sighed right beside him, and Icetail turned to her. "Is anything wrong?" he asked the she-cat. He noticed that she had been like that for quite a long time.

"I'm fine . . ." she murmured. His denmate looked up to the sky. "It's just that, is it wrong that I miss Dewfang—I mean Dewstar?" She turned to him. "He was a good MoonClan warrior, always serving the Clan at best. Who would've guessed who he truly was?"

"It's not wrong to miss him," Icetail murmured, remembering how close the two used to be. He still didn't quite understand how Dewstar could leave her for such selfish reasons. "I do too, but what happened had happened. MoonClan will always be our first priority no matter what happens."

"But I-I loved him," Dawnstripe went on, despite nodding with agreement. "I always go on thinking that if he stayed, we could of been mates and had kits together. I see you with Silverleaf . . . it makes me wonder if I would have been like that with Dewstar."

Icetail pressed his pelt to her's. "Don't worry, I think you two *would've* been like that," he comforted. "Dewstar didn't want to get you hurt. I think he felt the same to you as well, but I suppose he just made his choice to leave. He was ambitious in his own sort of way."

"You're ambitious too and you never left MoonClan," Dawnstripe pointed out.

I never thought that I was ambitious, Icetail thought. The two cats kept padding on in the forest. He looked at Dawnstripe, wondering what he could say to her. Sadness began to grip at his heart now that she has mentioned Dewstar. For a moment, he was silent, but then he decided that he had to push it away.

"I'm sure you'll find someone else." That's all what he thought he could say. "Don't you worry too much, Dawnstripe."

* * *

The patrolling almost took away the whole morning until they decided that they have done enough and went back to camp. As they entered, Icetail spotted Sharpfang paxing outside the nursery, while Sweetheart and Graywing crowded the inside.

He spotted his mate sitting by the nursery eagerly, trying to see what was going on. He padded up to Silverleaf. "What's going on?"

"Sagepelt is kitting," she whispered back. "I think she's done now—look." She was pointing to the den with her ears. Icetail turned and saw Sharpfang enter the den with Sweetheart's approval, being welcomed by the sound of small mews. For a moment Icetail was amazed. Sagepelt was still too early to be kitting, as she had only joined the nursery a little under one moon ago, so it surprised him that her kits came now. *I didn't think that she was this far along!*

"Let's go see them," Silverleaf suggested.

"Alright," he agreed. They crouched inside the nursery and spotted a few bundles suckling Sagepelt noisily. Sharpfang laid down next to his mate, draping his tail over them as the queen licked the kit's fur dry. There was only two of them, a gray tabby tom and a pale cream colored she-kit.

"They're beautiful, Sagepelt," Sharpfang purred to his mate. Icetail was surprised to see Sharpfang's change of character—the tom was normally quiet and reserved and never showed affection. But for the first time ever, he saw the love in Sharpfang's eyes as he gently groomed the gray tabby clean just as Sweetheart had suggested.

Silverleaf was purring too, and she pressed closer to Icetail, twining her tail with his. "They are lovely, aren't they?"

He nodded with agreement. "I'd be proud if they were mine."

"Thank you, Icetail." Sharpfang was looking up, his eyes still shining with pride. "That means a lot to me."

Silverleaf purred, and crouched by Sagepelt, beginning to speak to her.

Icetail remembered at that moment that Sharpfang used to be in love with his mother. Perhaps now, he was over her for sure? Maybe now Sharpfang forgave Featherbreeze and her kin for breaking his heart many moons ago. All of the negativity Icetail ever thought about him seemed to have washed away in this moment as he saw Sharpfang unravel himself for the first time.

"We shouldn't crowd them," Icetail whispered to his mate. "Let's let Sharpfang and Sagepelt meet their new kits."

She nodded and murmured her goodbyes to the new parents.

They both left the nursery, and as soon as they did, Flameheart padded up, his eyes on Icetail. "Brightstar is summoning you over," he meowed, pointing to the leader's den with his ears. "She told me to come and get you."

"Thank you, Flameheart," Icetail meowed. "I'll speak to you when I get back."

He left him to talk to Silverleaf and began walking over to the Moonrock. He peered inside to see Brightstar patiently waiting, grooming her pelt. She looked up, noticing him. Her gaze was warm, and her white, almost gray pelt was neat. "You may be wondering why I summoned you here. We have to discuss which cats we are taking to the gathering tonight."

"I forgot it was tonight!" he said with excitement. He still hadn't gotten fully used to his deputy duties yet, and the thought of going with a new rank made him nervous.

I wonder how Dewstar will react.

"So, I was thinking about leaving Sharpfang behind today," she explained. "He and Sagepelt had just had kits, so I think we should let them stay together."

"You're right," Icetail realized. "And maybe we should take the apprentices since it'll be there first gathering."

Brightstar shook her head. "Blackpaw isn't allowed to come. Volefur told me that Blackpaw put red fire ants in his sister's nest, so he deserved some kind of punishment."

Icetail's whiskers twitched with amusement. "Fine. Blackpaw can stay."

By the time Icetail and Brightstar finished discussing who should go to the gathering, Brightstar clambered on top of her den to make the announcements. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath the Moonrock for a Clan meeting!" she called.

Every cat went into the clearing, except for Sagepelt and her newborn kits of course. Icetail was at the foot of the Moonrock, already waiting for everyone to come. Once every cat was settled, Brightstar began her announcements.

"Since tonight is the full moon, I've decided which cats I should take with me to the gathering tonight," Brightstar began. "Here is who I've decided is coming: Icetail, Amberpaw, Silverleaf, Shadowheart, Ashtail, Stripeeyes, Bluewing, Sedgetooth, Sweetheart, Rosepetal, Fireshade, Crowflight, Flameheart, Swiftbreeze, Dawnstripe, Goldenpaw, Redsky and Goldsun. That is all."

Murmurs of approval whipped through the crowd, and Icetail heard Blackpaw groan at his mentor. Icetail didn't want to hear his complaints, so he went to go find Amberpaw.

"Hi," he meowed to his apprentice.

"Hi Icetail!" Amberpaw squeaked eagerly. "I can't believe that I am going to go to the gathering. I've heard all about it, but I can't wait to meet everyone!"

Icetail remembered how eager he was for his first gathering and purred. "If you're hungry, Amberpaw, choose something from the fresh-kill pile and then sleep afterwords. The trip to the gathering can be tiring. And you won't get much rest when we come back."

"Okay, Icetail, thank you!" Amberpaw said, running off with her sister, Goldpaw.

Icetail quickly shared a starling with Silverleaf before he went to sleep in his nest. His mate was close by, and he felt warm and comfortable by her touch. Slowly, his eyes closed and he drifted off to a deep sleep. He didn't expect at all that he'd dream today, but he was very wrong.

Icetail woke once more in a place he recognized. He was in the Twilight Forest, the dark forest for the cats who did not want to go to StarClan. He looked around, wondering why he was here. There was no moon or sun in the sky, and the air felt stiff and stagnant.

Slowly and cautiously, Icetail left his spot, his senses sharp as he listened carefully to his surroundings. Suddenly, a heavy weight was on to his shoulders, and he face-planted to the ground. Someone was pinning him down!

Icetail gathered his strength and pushed the cat off, his eyes wide. "Who are you?" he growled, but he immediately recognized Shard, the cat who visited him in his first ever dream of the Twilight Forest.

Shard slowly stood up. "Ow, ow, *ow*, Icetail, you didn't have to be so rough," he meowed, letting out a cough. "Playing dirty is too much for my old bones."

"Don't leap at me when I'm alert, then," snapped Icetail. "And aren't cats who die and go to StarClan or the Forest usually young?"

Shard shook his head. "Not really," he meowed. "We all return to StarClan in the forms of ourselves at our happiest moments. Maybe that's why you think I look old."

"Have you ever lived in the warrior Clans?" asked Icetail.

Shard nodded. "Sure. I lived long before any cats in the Clans. I was there at the making of DarkClan," he said, his tail flicking back and forth.

"The making of DarkClan!" exclaimed Icetail. "So it's true!"

He hadn't doubted that old elder's tail, but hadn't known for certain if it wasn't made up. Maybe this was evidence enough.

"I didn't come here to talk about how DarkClan was born," said the old tom dismissively. "I came to warn you of something."

"Don't tell me that you're going to give me another warning about the darkness," muttered Icetail with annoyance. "I haven't gotten enough of my peace—why can't it last?"

"I came to tell you that you are getting off track," Shard said. "The prophecy is a huge deal and can cost many lives, and you are the only one in the entire Clans who is so close to the answer. But lately, you haven't been giving it much thought. I think it's because of that warrior, Silverleaf."

"Silverleaf didn't do anything wrong!" spat Icetail.

"She's distracting you," snapped Shard, "that's what she is doing. Like I have said, you haven't been giving much thought about the prophecy these days. This won't be a good outcome for you or your Clanmates."

"Maybe it's because I needed a break!" Icetail retorted. "Besides, why do you care if I think about the dumb prophecy or not? The first time I met you, you tried to kill me! And this prophecy has nothing to do with you."

"I have my reasons," spat Shard.

"And so do I." Icetail's ears flicked with annoyance and his tail lashed. Shard couldn't just do this to him! It's too unfair. What about his feelings—his health? Couldn't he at least have a small break from thinking about this? Was that too much to ask?

Shard simply sighed. "Well, I'll let you in on one thing. If you don't get back on track with this prophecy, your loved ones will die, Icetail."

"Dead cats can't kill those who are alive," he retorted, flicking his tail over Shard's luminescent form.

"No, we can't kill cats that are alive," the Twilight Warrior growled. "In fact, *we* won't even be the cause of this tragedy at all. Your enemy is the cause of all this, Icetail—your *enemy*. You should

know this. And do not forget it."

Icetail narrowed his eyes. *Dewstar and the rest of DarkClan are my enemies,* he recalled. *Wait, is Shard meaning to tell me that something bad is going to happen at the gathering tonight?*

Suddenly, all of Icetail's surroundings vanished, and his woke up once more to see his mate, Silverleaf, standing over him. "Icetail, are you up already? It's almost time to go!"

"I'm up," said Icetail, slowly standing to his paws. He looked outside to see the full moon almost fully above the trees. Suddenly, he remembered his dreams. *My enemy will be the cause of my loved ones deaths if I do not do something about the prophecy*.

"Let's go. Brightstar is already calling us," she mewed. "We don't want to get left behind."

She began to leave the den, but Icetail stopped her. "Wait, Silverleaf." She turned and looked at him, and Icetail simply sighed. "Can you . . . *not* go to the gathering?"

Silverleaf's eyes widened. "What? Why?"

"I just don't feel good when Dewstar is there," he admit. Part of it was a lie, part of it was true. "Dewstar used to want you as a mate, remember? He won't be so pleased to see you."

"Oh please, Icetail," she scoffed. "He was only trying to do that to get to you in the past. And besides, I can take care of myself."

He wanted to convince her more, but he didn't want to get her mad. He simply sighed and brushed past her, padding over to Brightstar. "Fine, Silverleaf. But please don't stray to close to DarkClan," he begged, taking another glance back.

Silverleaf nodded. "I suppose it wouldn't hurt to stay away from them."

Icetail smiled sadly. *Good,* he thought. *If anything were to happen to you, I would never forgive myself. Don't worry. If anything* does *happen, I will protect you.*

Chapter Forty

Edited ✔

Icetail poked his head through the bramble thickets of the gathering entrance. They were the first Clan there, and he was surprised to see how empty and large the clearing actually was. He looked around with amazement in his eyes.

The full moon was fixed right above the tall pine trees and oak trees that surrounded the very spacious clearing, and the large gray rock in the center looked polished and silver. Every cat in MoonClan began to file out, finding their places to sit. Icetail made his way through his Clan and sat at the base of the rock.

"Wondering what it's like at the top?" Brightstar asked.

"Yeah, but only leaders go up there," Icetail pointed out with a small *mrrow* of laughter. "I don't think I'm allowed."

"You're probably right," she said. "You might get your chance one day." The leader gathered up her haunches and leaped up on top of the rock, hauling herself up. He remained by the base of the rock, quietly grooming himself. He wasn't surprised to see his apprentice, Amberpaw, scamper up.

"Icetail!" she exclaimed. "The gathering is so cool! Better than the nursery tales!" She eagerly looked around.

"When the Clans arrive, be sure to watch what you say to who you talk to," he advised. As Amberpaw tilted her head, he explained: "Don't share any MoonClan battle moves with the other Clans. Also, never mention the troubles of your Clan. If you say too much, you'll let them know on our secrets, they'll have advantages over us. If you let them know too little, they'll be suspicious. Understand?"

"I understand!" Amberpaw declared.

Icetail watched and waited to see which Clan was coming up next. He immediately saw StreamClan's leader, Lakestar, emerge from the entrance, at the same time as Stonestar, MarshClan's leader.

"Go on and talk," he advised. "You should get to know the other apprentices."

"Thank you, Icetail," she purred, running off once more. He watched her go, looking around the clearing and wondering if Thornheart was there. He wasn't surprised when he didn't spit him amongst StreamClan's warriors. After all, Lakestar wouldn't want a MoonClan warrior to suddenly emerge at the gathering with his own Clan.

They waited for a few moments longer, until he finally saw Swiftstar arrive through the entrance, shortly after, followed by Dewstar. Icetail's breath caught in his throat as he saw his brother. The white tom was looking around the gathering place as his cats filed into the clearing.

Dewstar then spotted Icetail, and his eyes narrowed as he began to pad up. "Icetail," he greeted. "I did not expect to see you here. I thought you would be too devastated after the death of your father."

A low growl arose from Icetail's throat. "He was your father too. Killing him doesn't change that fact."

Dewstar smirked. "You're right. Just because I am responsible for his death, it doesn't mean he wasn't my father." He paused, and sighed. "Well, anyways, being a leader and all, can't stay and chat. See you."

Icetail watched as his brother leaped onto the leader's rock, sitting beside Brightstar. Her body tended as she glared at the traitor, inching away from him. Icetail averted his eyes from the leaders, and looked back to the gathering crowd. He spotted Silverleaf with Dawnstripe and a few warriors from CloudClan talking at the far end of the clearing. Relief filled his heart to see that she was still okay.

Then, he suddenly was faced by another cat. He quickly saw a cat he recognized from a dream he once had. Her tabby markings and hazel eyes looked all too much like Featherbreeze. It was Lilyclaw, his sister! He burst from his spot and made his way over to her. She immediately took notice of him and turned to face him.

"You are Icetail, right?" she asked eagerly. Not much has changed since she was a kit, except the color of her fur had darkened a bit. He reminded her so much of their mother . . .

Icetail nodded. "Yes, I am. And you must be Lilyclaw."

"You got that right," she meowed with a purr. "I can't believe I'm finally meeting you after all this time! I was so surprised to find out that Dewstar was my brother. And you too?"

"I couldn't believe I had a sister, either," he said. Lilyclaw's eyes shone bright.

"The gathering will now begin!" yowled Swiftstar from the leader's rock.

He looked apologetically to his sister. "I'm sorry, but I have to go. Maybe I'll get a chance to speak with you after the gathering is over. Okay, Lilyclaw?"

She nodded. "Okay."

He left her and padded to the base of the rock where the deputies usually sat. "Now that every cat is settled, I feel that it's right for me to go first," meowed Dewstar, his voice ringing around the crowd.

Icetail looked up to his brother. Dewstar's dark blue eyes glinted under the moonlight, his pelt neatly groomed. He looked dazzling upon the leader's rock. A spark of jealousy flooded through Icetail, but he controlled it. *At least I'm the deputy of MoonClan*, he thought. *There's no way I would ever want to be a part of DarkClan*.

"DarkClan is doing well, and the warm weather provided us greatly. The previous leader, Sandstar, has passed and lost her ninth life a little while ago. I became the new leader of DarkClan, now known as Dewstar." His eyes gleamed.

Icetail heard murmurs of gossip going around. What caught his ear was, "He's the murderer!"

"Dewstar! Dewstar!" cats cheered, cutting off those who whispered. The only cats who didn't cheer were the cats of MoonClan and the cats of CloudClan. Icetail didn't cheer himself because he couldn't bring himself up for it. *Dewstar is unforgivable. Dewstar is evil. Dewstar shouldn't live.* All these nasty thoughts filed into his mind.

"The deputy of DarkClan is Woodclaw." He pointed his tail towards a cat with oak-colored fur and amber eyes. Once every cat settled from yowling his name, Dewstar concluded, "And that is all."

He sat back on the leader's rock. Immediately, before anyone else stood up, Brightstar took the front. "May I go next?" she asked the other leaders. No objections were made, so she began. "A few days ago, the sad death of our deputy, Sparrowheart occurred. Our new deputy is Icetail."

"Icetail! Icetail!" cats chanted. Icetail listened to his name as the cats from MoonClan, StreamClan, MarshClan and CloudClan chanted. Of course, Dewstar silenced his Clan. Lilyclaw was the only DarkClan cat that praised him.

"And upon the making of the new deputy," Brightstar continued, "I've also named three new apprentices: Amberpaw, Goldenpaw and Blackpaw." When their names were finished chanting, Brightstar went on. "We also have good prey in the Clan, and this morning, Sagepelt safely delivered her kits."

"That's good to hear, Brightstar," said Swiftstar. "I shall go next." When Brightstar nodded of approval, he continued, "Lately, CloudClan has thrived as well. We have a new apprentice, Rabbitpaw."

"Rabbitpaw! Rabbitpaw!" every cat chanted.

Once they settled down, Swiftstar continued. "Birdsong moved into the nursery expecting Buzzardfang's kits. Though I must say, lately at our borders by DarkClan, things are stirring up again. As a warning, Dewstar, just because you are a new leader, it does not

mean you own the entire forest or the moors or the lakes. If I find DarkClan scents across our border, we won't hesitate to attack. That is all for CloudClan."

Dewstar was glaring at Swiftstar.

"I'm next," Lakestar called. His ears flicked down to the StreamClan cats. "Our rivers and streams have been plentiful. On top of that, a queen of ours, Mistyleaf, has had her kits. The father is a former MoonClan warrior—Thornheart—who has now joined my Clan."

Icetail watched cats look confused back and forth. *Yes, they broke the warrior code. Be quiet*! he thought. *I'm sure it has happened before*. He clawed the ground impatiently. Lakestar sat back down beside Dewstar, and the last leader, Stonestar of MarshClan, went.

"MarshClan has been thriving well too," the she-cat began, "and we are just as strong as the other Clans. We haven't had any new warriors nor apprentices, but our current apprentices are close to their warrior assessments." She looked down two two MarshClan cats with pride. "And we haven't gotten new queens either, but with this lasting warmth and the plentiful prey, it's bound to happen anytime soon."

He dipped his head and took his place beside the other leaders. "This gathering is over," Lakestar meowed. In just moments, the chattering went on again.

Icetail sighed and padded away from the rock. A tail touched his spine, and he turned to see a MarshClan cat standing close. "Congratulations on being the new deputy," the tom said.

"Thank you," Icetail replied, dipping his head.

"I'm Pineheart," he meowed. "It was good to meet you." He dipped his head in acknowledgement and then padded away to join his Clan. Stonestar was gathering warriors and leading them out of the gathering place. The bright moon was still above the Clan, but he supposed that some cats just couldn't stay too long.

Icetail weaved through the crowd to join his mate. "Hi, Silverleaf,"

he purred as he reached her. "Did you meet anyone new?"

She shrugged. "Not anyone in particular. Anyways, who was that she-cat you were talking to earlier?" Curiosity filled her gaze. "You two seemed very friendly."

"She's actually my sister," Icetail told her. "She's a DarkClan cat, but she's a good cat. I just wanted to meet her for the first time." He turned to the DarkClan crowd, and met Lilyclaw's eyes. "Do you want to meet her, too?"

"Sure," said Silverleaf, pressing close to Icetail. He lead her to them, and he eagerly met with Lilyclaw once more.

"Hi Lilyclaw," said Icetail. She turned to him eagerly. "It's good to see you again. This is my mate, Silverleaf." He gestured to the silver-furred warrior, and the two she-cats came together, touching each other's noses. He looked up the leader's rock and noticed Brightstar and Dewstar talking closely. "Err, wait here. I'll be right back," he meowed apologetically.

Icetail walked away from them, leaving them to talk. He was curious about what his leader and his brother were talking about. Surely Dewstar wasn't apologizing? That was impossible. Brightstar would never forgive him. He tried his best to listen to what they were saying, but no cat said a thing. Icetail noticed that Lakestar and Swiftstar were gone with their Clans as well. MoonClan and DarkClan were the only two Clans left in the clearing.

"Brightstar," Icetail called from below the rock. "It's time to go, right? We should get our warriors rested!" He was looking hopefully at her.

"You're right, Icetail. I'm going," meowed the white-furred leader. She began to pad down the leader's rock, but Dewstar stopped her.

"Surely you can't leave just *yet*," Dewstar meowed. "We just began talking, Brightstar." His blue eyes sparked with something Icetail couldn't read. He had an uneasy feeling deep within his belly.

"What is it now?" she snarled.

Dewstar's eyes narrowed. "DarkClan, attack!" he yowled to his Clan. Icetail's eyes widened, and immediately without warning, the cats did as told and leaped at the MoonClan warriors, teeth bared and claws out.

"What about the truce?!" snarled Icetail, staring at his brother with shock.

"I don't care what those dead cats think of me or my Clan! They fear us! DarkClan is the strongest Clan ever, and once we beat you, we're taking your territory!" Dewstar snarled back. He leaped at Brightstar, but the leader jumped out of the way, making Dewstar tumble down the rock.

"Go fight your own battle!" Brightstar yowled. "Dewstar is mine!"

Icetail hesitantly nodded before he dashed away. *I can't believe he would do something like this under a full moon! We'll be shredded!* thought the deputy with dread.

Battle yowls were sounded throughout the clearing, and Icetail's eyes were wide as he was watching his Clanmates fight off the DarkClan warriors. Brightstar was wrestling Dewstar to the ground, but the white tom didn't give up. With the strength of TigerClan and LionClan combined, Dewstar fought, trying to kick her away to get on the stronger side.

"Stop!" Icetail yowled, desperate. "We can't fight like this! Stop this, Dewstar!" He looked up to the sky anxiously to eatch as the clearing darkened. Clouds drifted over the moon, blackening the sky. "StarClan doesn't approve!" he yowled. "Just go home!"

"Who cares about StarClan?" growled a DarkClan warrior. "They never cared about us; we shall never care about them!" He leaped onto Icetail, locking his paws around his neck.

Icetail howled with pain as he felt the warrior's sharp claws dig into his pelt, and he kicked his belly with his backpaws. Icetail gripped onto his neck, and the warrior clawed at his pelt in return. He heard a yowl from the clearing. Amberpaw! It was his apprentice! He kicked away the DarkClan warrior and ran to where the yowl

sounded. He saw his apprentice laying battered on the ground, with two large scratches going down her flank. She barely had any battle training, she couldn't fight this battle!

"Amberpaw!" he gasped. "Get up, you're in no condition to fight!"

"I-I can still fight," she coughed, staggering up. "I have to save Bluewing . . ."

"Amberpaw!" Goldenpaw yowled.

Icetail looked at them sternly. "You two, get out of here as fast as you can and go back to MoonClan camp. Call reinforcements if you have to! Go!"

Goldenpaw nodded, and she let Amberpaw lean on her as she ran out of the gathering's clearing. Icetail watched them go, relieved that they were safe and away. He immediately turned back to the battle, knowing that he had to help his Clanmates.

The DarkClan cats won't listen to me, he thought angrily. *I have to put a stop to this by force!* He saw Mousetail being pinned down by a black-and-white DarkClan she-cat, and ran towards them. He leaped at the she-cat, shoving her off of the old warrior, and immediately raked his claws through her pelt.

She growled and swiped at him, but he dodged her easily since he was the one at advantage. "Get out of here," he growled to her, "Or I'll have to kill you."

She narrowed her eyes. "Never!"

Without hesitating, she forced herself forward and gripped onto Icetail's neck with her teeth before wrapped her paws around him. He screeched with pain, squirming under her grip.

"Icetail!" gasped Mousetail, rushing over. He growled at the DarkClan cat and raked her ears, making her let go of Icetail immediately. She turned to him and dug her claws deep in his hind leg, chomping down hard with his teeth, ripping away flesh. He howled with pain, trying to shake her off.

Icetail grabbed onto her back and dug his teeth in her neck, a killing bite. For a moment, she held onto Mousetail's leg fiercely, but her grip loosened and Mousetail managed to break free from her deadly grip. A terrible wound was revealed on his leg, one so bad that it seemed too painful for Mousetail walk on.

"I know it's wrong to kill, but she would of ripped your leg off if I hadn't done anything!" Icetail said quickly, glancing over at the dead body. "I'm sorry."

"D-don't be." Mousetail winced in pain as he tried to put down his paw. "This pain is worse than anything that I have ever felt!"

"Lean on me. I'll get you to Sweetheart, she will help," he meowed. Mousetail nodded and leaned onto Icetail as he supported him away from the fighting cats as best as he could.

Is this what Shard meant that my loved ones might die or get hurt? he thought with dread. *And how did he know that this would happen in the first place?*

Flameheart ran up, panting. "Icetail! You have to come, it's Brightstar!"

"What happened to her?" demanded Icetail.

"She's losing a life," Flameheart informed, catching his breath. "We have to get her away from the clearing. How many lives does she have left?"

Icetail was frozen in shock. Brightstar had two lives left previously . . . and now that she died again, this meant that she was on her last life. If she gets killed again, she'll be dead for good! "You have to take me to her," demanded Icetail.

"Don't worry," said Mousetail. "I can make it on my own." He limped away from Icetail towards Sweetheart, and the medicine cat immediately came to his aid. Icetail ran away from there, and followed Flameheart as his friend led the way to their leader.

Brightstar was splayed out with blood pooling around her. There were several fresh scratches along her flank, and one on her nose.

Dewstar *really* had beat her up.

"Take her to Sweetheart!" he told Flameheart, "I'm going to find my brother."

"Alright," Flameheart said, grabbing the MoonClan leader by the scruff. He dragged her away, and when Icetail knew that she was safe, he looked around the clearing anxiously to find Dewstar. He was nowhere to be seen—he must of fled the gathering place.

Suddenly, worry filled his heart. Where was Silverleaf? Surely she wasn't harmed, was she? He searched around for her silver pelt, and found her fighting off a large DarkClan tom side-by-side with Dawnstripe, the two defending each other's backs strongly.

Icetail knew what he had to do. He had to end this battle fast. "MoonClan, retreat!" he yowled through the clearing.

This battle was lost, he thought with a pang of sadness. *But if I let them stay any longer, then my Clanmates are going to get killed!*

He watched as the MoonClan cats gathered up in a hurry towards the entrance. Ashtail was helping Sweetheart and Mousetail carry Brightstar's recovering body away, while Dawnstripe and Silverleaf dashed out of the clearing after them. Shadowheart was carrying Bluewing's limp body, and Nightrose and Flameheart were carrying Sedgetooth's limp body as well.

He felt dreaded. Were they dead? But his thoughts were cut short.

"Hello Icetail," laughed a voice from behind.

Icetail swiftly turned, meeting Dewstar's menacing gaze.

"Dewstar!" he gasped. In a swift motion before his brother could react, Dewstar brought his paws down hard onto Icetail's face, and the world around Icetail all went black.

* * *

Icetail's eyes slowly opened to voices. "Icetail! Icetail, please don't go," yowled a voice all too familiar. He looked up to see Silverleaf's

brilliant fur shining against the rising sun that barely had come over the tree tips.

Her head was pressed against his pelt, and her breathing shaking.

"Where am I . . .?" he murmured. Silverleaf looked up, her eyes filled with relief. In that same moment, Icetail coughed up blood, and suddenly the thoughts of the battle entered his mind.

"Give him space!" demanded Sweetheart. "He needs air."

Silverleaf nodded and stepped back reluctantly.

"Sweetheart, what happened?" he asked the medicine cat.

"Dewstar got you," she responded. "Shadowheart noticed and he ran to you in time before he was able to hurt you any further."

"Where's Brightstar?" he went on.

"She's in her den, recovering. She's awake but she has a severe wound on her side." Then, Sweetheart's gaze clouded. "MoonClan's losses were grave today. Mousetail's wound was so bad that I don't think he'll be able to walk normally again. What's worse is . . Bluewing and Sedgetooth lost their lives."

"Oh no," murmured Icetail. "It's all my fault!"

Shard had warned me of this, he thought with pain, squeezing his eyes shut. *My Clanmates could have been saved if I had taken his words more serious!*

"It's not your fault!" gasped Silverleaf. "You got hurt as much as our Clanmates did. Just look at those scratches along your pelt, it's horrible!"

"I can't believe this," he murmured. "Dewstar is going crazy . . ."

Icetail looked up at the rising sun from where he lay. His scratches burned, his heart ached, and his shoulders felt heavy. *I should of listened to Shard,* he thought again. *It's my fault. I'm sorry, StarClan, for straying away from my duty. I can't do it again. I just can't. It's all*

my fault!

My heart can't take this. He closed his eyes tightly, and thought about his brother. *Why did you have to become so evil, Dewstar?*

Allegiances - PART THREE

This is part three of the book :) yeah I know, there's a lot of chapters so far, but I have a goal of about up to ten-twenty more chapters, so I also decided to make a part three lol. There's gonna be a lot more Icetail's Enemy coming up ^_-

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MoonClan

Leader: Brightstar - white she-cat with gray stripes and blue eyes

Deputy: Icetail - battle-scarred gray tom with white paws, a white underbelly, a torn ear and amber eyes (apprentice: Amberpaw)

Medicine Cat: Sweetheart - cream colored she-cat with brown eyes

Warriors:

Sharpfang - gray tom with blue eyes

Stonetooth - brown tabby tom with light green eyes

Ashtail - ginger tom with green eyes

Crowflight - black tom-cat with white tail tip, white ears and amber eyes

Swiftbreeze - gray she-cat with green eyes

Rosepetal - gray tabby she-cat with a sleek pelt and blue eyes

Fireshade - orange tom with green eyes and a white tail tip

Nightrose - black she-cat with white paws, a white tail-tip and white ear tips

Shadowheart - black tom with amber eyes

Redsky - ginger she-cat with green eyes

Hawkheart - gray tom with black paws and stripes

Shiningmoon - orange she-cat with blue eyes

Goldsun - white she-cat with golden yellow eyes

Skypelt - big white tom with brown eyes

Petalwing - Small cream she-cat with a fluffy tail and blue eyes

Rainwhisker - dark gray tom with white paws and amber eyes

Volefur - large white tom with brown eyes (apprentice: Blackpaw)

Dawnstripe - light orange she-cat with brown eyes (apprentice: Goldenpaw)

Flameheart - rusty orange tom with amber eyes

Silverleaf - silver she-cat with light blue eyes

Squirreltail - gray tom cat

Apprentices:

Goldenpaw - golden and white she-cat

Amberpaw - ginger she-cat

Blackpaw - black tom cat

Queens:

Sagepelt - golden she-cat with brilliant green eyes (kits: Shadekit - gray tom kit with black tabby marks, and Berrykit - cream-colored she-kit. Father is Sharpfang).

Elders:

Thrushclaw- old brown tabby tom with light brown eyes

Stripeeyes- almost blind gray tabby tom

Mousetail - brown tom with hazel eyes

Adderclaw - brown tom with large white paws and green eyes

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DarkClan

Leader: Dewstar - white tom with dark blue eyes

Deputy: Woodclaw - oak-brown tom with amber eyes

Medicine Cat: Hazelleaf - tawny she-cat with white underbelly and hazel eyes

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CloudClan

Leader: Swiftstar - large black and white tom cat with green eyes

Deputy: Echoleaf - muscular brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Medicine Cat: Violettooth - dark ginger she-cat with green eyes (apprentice: Splashface)

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StreamClan

Leader: Lakestar - gray tom cat with light blue eyes and a torn ear

Deputy: Moleheart - dark gray tabby tom with green eyes

Ferretheart - white tom with green eyes

Medicine Cat: Daisyleap - white she-cat with green eyes

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MarshClan

Leader: Stonestar - gray tabby she-cat cat with green eyes

Deputy: Berryheart - white tom cat with ginger splotches

Medicine Cat:
Pineheart - brown tabby tom with green eyes

Gorsewind - brown tom with a white underbelly, white paws and amber eyes

_____
OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Loners:
Bells - tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Kittypets:
Flower
Jewel
Sunshine
Milo

Chapter Forty One

Edited ✔

The large branches of the tall oak trees were caught with the wind, rustling as the cold breeze swept by. The sun was barely visible against the gray clouds in the sky, and Icetail felt cold. Two moons have passed since DarkClan had attacked MoonClan, and things were different ever since. Nobody in the Clan felt easy anymore—Dewstar stole a small portion of MoonClan's territory that day as well, declaring that they had won the battle, and MoonClan had lost.

He clawed the ground just thinking about it. *Cold-season is so close now,* he thought, *and MoonClan is already starting to go hungry. If only we had won the battle, if only I had prevented it, then we would still have that part of our territory. The Clan wouldn't be so hungry if it weren't for me!*

"Icetail!" Amberpaw called, running up to him. "Icetail, look what I caught!"

He looked down to his apprentice, his thoughts broken apart. "What is it?" he asked her, trying to sound nice.

Amberpaw held up a scrawny black raven. "I stepped on a dead leaf and it heard me coming, but I caught it's wings and killed it before it could take off," she meowed. "How did I do?"

"You did great, Amberpaw," purred Icetail. "Go on, get back to hunting now. We're going to go back pretty soon."

She nodded and ran off with the raven in her jaws, eager to take it back to the Clan. Icetail sighed, and concentrated on his own hunting. He listened to his surroundings carefully. He wasn't so good at scenting, but he had very good hearing.

He could hear a mouse scrambling inside the trunk of a tree, and

the sound of a bird up high in the branches flapping quietly around. He listened more carefully, trying to see if there was something he could reach. Small paws pattered against the earth, stepping over dead leaves and broke twigs.

There!

A scent reached his nose; vole! Icetail crouched down on the ground, and saw the vole looking around the forest floor for food. He crept from his spot, keeping as low to the ground as he could possibly go, until he was close enough to taste its scent, and pounced. Immediately, his teeth grappled around its body, and it squealed, but the sounds died away as he delivered a swift killing bite.

Pleased, he buried his prey and went out to find more.

"That was a good catch you had there," Ashtail's voice rose from the undergrowth. The warrior crept out from the cover. "I was going to hunt that before you came."

"Sorry," Icetail apologized.

"It's okay," Ashtail meowed with a shrug. "At least it'll feed the Clan."

He nodded. "Yeah, I guess." He looked from his spot and studied his surroundings. A large crash sounded, and he jumped, suddenly alert. "What was that?" Icetail demanded.

"It was probably a tree," murmured Ashtail. "The same thing happened a quarter-moon ago, remember?"

"All the prey is going to be scared away!" he hissed. "Why can't those dumb Twolegs stop cutting our trees? It's not like they need them!"

Ashtail sighed. "I'm going to go back to hunting," he meowed. "I need to bring back something for the Clan too. I'll meet you here soon." He padded away, his tail flicking. He disappeared once more into the undergrowth, and Icetail watched until his friend was gone completely.

He fixed his gaze on the forest around him. *Things really haven't been the same for me or the Clan,* he thought. *I wish Dewstar never turned against us.*

These thoughts kept running in his mind, until he heard something else. A squirrel was climbing an oak tree, and settled on one of the branches, chewing away at a seed in it's paws. His heart leaped. More prey!

Silently, Icetail began to climb its neighboring tree. He gripped onto the soft bark of the oak tree with his claws and hauled himself upon the first branch, and then leaped to the next as silent as a night predator. He gathered his haunches and leaped at the next tree, landing as lightly as he could. His eyes narrowed at the squirrel, and he leaped onto the branch, taking no time at all to grip his claws into its fluffy tail. It screeched with fear and tried to leap away, but Icetail had already caught a hold of it. He snapped it's neck with a killing bite, and then leaped down from his spot on the tree, landing roughly on the forest floor.

He dug up his vole, and took his prey away, decided that what he had was good enough. He stalked through the forest silently to the spot he was supposed to meet with his patrol, and waited patiently until his apprentice and Ashtail showed up.

Amberpaw was carrying her raven and a scrawny mouse, and Ashtail held a thrush in his jaws. He nodded to them, and led them back to camp quietly. Icetail wasn't in the mood to talk. His mood hasn't been good for a an entire moon now.

He sighed and kept padding on until the camp walls were visible. He walked through the entrance and padded over to the fresh-kill pile, dropping down his share on the empty pile.

"Amberpaw, take your raven to the elders please," he meowed, "And then give the vole to Sagepelt and the kits."

"Yes Icetail," Amberpaw said, doing as told.

Icetail padded from the fresh-kill pile, wandering around the camp. There was nothing going on—DarkClan had often tried to pick

fights with MoonClan border patrols, but MoonClan often got away from them, carrying out their duties as usual. All of his comrades knew that they had much to lose. Engaging in battle with DarkClan again would only make matters worse.

Ever since that battle at the gathering, nothing had been the same anymore, he thought once more, sitting by himself. He looked up to the dark sky, wondering what had gone wrong, wondering what he had to do. *I don't know the next steps that I need to take in order to find the meaning of the prophecy. This is too hard!*

He clawed the ground as he thought, thinking about Shard's warning from two moons ago. If Icetail didn't do anything about the prophecy, Shard explained that his loved ones would die. He sighed, and began to groom his pelt.

Mousetail limped over. "Hi Icetail," meowed the old warrior. "You seemed pretty lonely, sulking in the shadows all by yourself."

"I guess," Icetail mumbled.

Mousetail hadn't been able to walk properly since that battle. The she-cat apparently caused a permanent wound on his leg and stirred up an infection, and Mousetail claimed it was much too painful to walk. He had to retire to the elder's den because he couldn't carry out his duties well, but Mousetail said it was about time anyway.

"How was hunting?" he went on.

"It was good," Icetail explained, "better than it has been compared to yesterday. I hope Silverleaf's patrol finds something. We only have enough for a paw-full of warriors right now . . ."

Mousetail's gaze was up in the sky. "If anything, I wouldn't eat if the warriors are starved." He sighed and lied down right beside Icetail. "It makes me feel bad that they waist their energy. Being an elder isn't fun, in my perspective anyway. I wish I could have done more for the Clan."

"I wouldn't eat if my Clanmates were hungry, either," Icetail commented.

"You're a good cat," purred Mousetail. "Brightstar was right for choosing you as her deputy. You'll be as good as a leader than Sparrowheart could of been."

"Thank you," Icetail meowed. *I'm not sure if I'll even* become *leader,* Icetail thought. *Dewstar might kill me before that can ever happen.*

"Look, the hunting patrol from the DarkClan border is back," said Mousetail, standing up.

The DarkClan hunting patrol was lead by Silverleaf, followed by Dropeyes, Volefur, and his apprentice, Blackpaw. At the same moment, the DarkClan border patrol padded through the entrance. Sharpfang was in the lead of that one.

Icetail got up from his spot and padded over to Silverleaf. He noticed a long scratch along her side. "What happened, Silverleaf?" he asked. "DarkClan?"

Silverleaf's claws scraped the ground as she shook her head. "Twolegs, that's what happened. We barely managed to catch anything! Those Twolegs had to cut down that tree—"

"You were there?" he asked.

"Yes, I was," growled Silverleaf. "Those fox-hearted Twolegs almost crushed us! We all barely managed to escape being crushed. I just got scratched by a branch, that's all. We're all fine, though."

"That's good to hear." Icetail's shoulders slumped with relief. "Now that there are no patrols left by DarkClan, I'd better set out watch patrols."

Watch patrols were patrols that kept an eye on the DarkClan borders in secret all night to make sure that there was no trouble stirring up there. A moon ago, Icetail and Brightstar decided to establish them because they felt uneasy leaving their borders unprotected. If anything were to happen, those who watched the borders would return straight to camp to report.

"I'll come with you," Silverleaf meowed. "Anyways, as I was saying, we didn't really catch much. I managed to catch a starling, and

Blackpaw caught a frog."

"A frog?" Icetail asked with surprise as they padded over to the warrior's den. "What was a frog doing on our territory? Don't they normally reside in MarshClan?"

"I suppose, but prey is prey," mewed Silverleaf.

Icetail shuddered. *There's no way I'm eating a frog!* he thought with disgust. He entered the warrior's den, looking around to see which three cats should go on the watch patrol. Most were in camp already, the only patrol left out being the CloudClan border patrol.

"Stonetooth," he meowed, seeing the warrior sitting alone. "You can lead the watch patrol tonight. Crowflight and Rosepetal may go with you."

Stonetooth dipped his head. "Alright, that's fine by me."

Icetail nodded with approval, and turned back to Silverleaf. "I'm done with that," he said.

"The second border patrol had just returned," Silverleaf informed, her eyes turned to the camp entrance.

Icetail watched as Brightstar's patrol arrived. The leader was carrying a small mouse, and she dropped in on the pile as soon as she returned. The rest of the patrol clambered in to camp, exhausted. Icetail felt bad to see the state his Clanmates were in.

Dawnstripe was getting skinny, her ribs almost showing because she hadn't had much to eat these past few days. Swiftbreeze and Fireshade were both getting sick due to the chilling weather. Goldenpaw and Silverbreeze both kept waking up on the painful feeling of an empty stomach, and the rest of his Clanmates were plain hungry, with barely enough to go by each day.

Icetail was hungry himself, but he didn't want to admit it in case his Clanmates felt bad.

"The warriors may begin to pick their shares of the fresh-kill pile," called Brightstar after she checked on the elders and kits.

Icetail peered over to the pile. There were only two mice, a starling, a thrush, a squirrel and a frog. His belly rumbled, so he forced himself to turn his gaze away.

Silverleaf grabbed one of the mice and padded over to Icetail. "Want to share this?" she asked. "You look hungry."

"I . . . I'm not," meowed Icetail. "I shared a mouse with Sweetheart this morning." He felt bad for lying, but he didn't want his mate to go hungry. "Share it with Dawnstripe instead, don't worry about me."

She sighed and nodded. "Alright, if you had already eaten," she mewed, padding over to Dawnstripe.

He was pleased to see the pleasant look on Dawnstripe's face once the prey was shown to her. He sighed and padded to his nest, willing to sleep. *Maybe if I dream about eating prey, I won't be so hungry anymore,* he thought.

He lied down in his nest, sleep overcoming him.

Hi :D So this is officially the start of part three, and it is starting in leaf-bare. Yay, who's excited? c:

Well, this was just a filler chapter to inform readers what's happening to MoonClan after the battle. I've never done this Clan- starvation thing before, so I decided to give it a try to make the book more interesting and have more drama n' stuff.

How do you guys like this chapter? ^_^ as always, vote, share, comment.

~L.TC

Chapter Forty Two

Edited ✔

Two chapters in one day? I'm on fire >:D

Icetail woke up at moonhigh, his pelt ruffled after a long night of sleep. He felt that it was morning before he fully processed where he was, and when he looked outside and noticed the position of the moon, his heart dropped with disappointment. *Dawn is a long way from now.*

He glanced over at Silverleaf. Her silver pelt sparkled like the stars in the night sky at the moon's touch. All of his denmates slept soundly. The only cats missing were Stonetooth, Crowflight and Nightrose. He remembered sending them out for the watch patrol before going off to sleep.

He sighed, clambering out of his nest as quietly as he could possibly go, careful not to stir Silverleaf awake or step on any of his other denmates. *There's no way I can sleep. Not on a night like this*, he thought as he made his way to the clearing from the warriors den. As he looked up to the sky, he realized that the moon was barely visible. Nothing but a single crescent in the sky. Despite that, the stars still shone brilliantly.

After scanning the quiet clearing, he silently padded out of the camp. He was especially careful to go unnoticed. Waking up his Clanmates would be bad—Brightstar forbade patrols of less than three to be out, especially if cats were to travel alone on the territory. And now, since DarkClan was more hostile than ever, the rule was enforced heavily.

It would be bad if the deputy was caught going against the leader's word.

He crept away, his body pressed to the cold ground as he brushed passed stiff strands of grass. *I haven't been alone like this in the forest*

since I was an apprentice, he recalled. *Since the day Featherbreeze died.* He weaved through the cover of the oak trees, his nose burning from the dry cold air. He didn't know where his paws were taking him, but he simply could not rest at all.

Anywhere would do.

His pelt ruffled in the wrong way as the wind blew, but he walked on regardless, aware that it was dangerous to be out alone at night. His only goal in mind was to see Silverpelt without trees obstructing his view, to feel as if his ancestors were watching him. Finally, Icetail realized that he made it near CloudClan's borders. He couldn't scent their markers due to the direction the wind blew, but he could easily see the open moor from a far distance, stretching out to merge with the sky, no clear indication of a horizon line.

Icetail padded out of the cover of the trees and looked up at Silverpelt, eyes shimmering in its reflection. Countless stars in the night sky shone down on him. He shivered, cold, and pressed himself down on the ground, rolling onto to get a better view.

I never noticed that the moon could be so big even when it's not full, he thought, observing its slender shape. *And the stars too, they shine so bright.*

He watched Silverpelt twinkle as thought of the cats who died, especially those cared about the most. Vinetail, Featherbreeze and Sparrowheart must be watching down on him right now. His heart ached. He wished that his parents and the old medicine cat were down here with him. He wished that Dewstar never left MoonClan. Everything could of been different.

He felt another presence from the forest and lifted his head, wondering who had followed him from camp. He was surprised to see Sharpfang. The senior warrior looked back at him, his eyes shining brilliantly.

"What are you doing here?" Icetail asked, unable to move from his spot.

"I can ask you the same thing," Sharpfang meowed, sitting beside

him. "Why have you strayed so far from camp? You know Brightstar's rules."

"Don't lecture me like a kit," retorted Icetail, returning his gaze to the stars. "I just needed to think, that's all."

Sharpfang was silent for a moment, before asking, "What are you thinking about?"

Icetail looked at him, surprised once more. Did Sharpfang even care? "Why do you want to know?"

"Even though we never had a friendship, I'm just curious," he responded simply. "Watching you grow up, though, has been like raising a kit from a distance. Even though I was never particularly nice to you," he added.

Icetail closed his eyes. "Everything going through my head is so hard to explain," murmured the gray tom. "I've been thinking about my life and all. I wish my parents were still alive. I wonder why the stars shine so brightly even though I feel so much pain . . ."

"Don't waist your time on such thoughts," Sharpfang meowed. The comment wasn't rude. Instead, there was a bit of affectione behind his voice. "Moving on is hard when you want things you can't get."

"I learned that the hard way," Icetail meowed dryly.

"Life *is* hard," Sharpfang responded. "Now, what are you really thinking about? There must be something more important in the back of your head. More important than the questions you can't answer, the things you can't change. I'm sure you'd like to spill it out."

"If I tell you, you won't believe me."

"I don't know if I will or not, but I won't tell anyone what you are about to tell me." Sharpfang stared down at Icetail. For the first time ever, the older warrior was being *nice,* suppressing sympathy that he didn't know Sharpfang was even capable of. Maybe becoming a father had changed his view on life. Maybe things about him changed as he brought new kits into the Clan.

"I guess so," Icetail murmured, deciding to trust his inner judgement about Sharpfang. "Everything began when I was an apprentice. On the day of my ceremony, I had a dream that shattered my peace forever." Sharpfang looked down at him with interest and alarm mixed together. "I was being chased by a cat who wanted to kill me, and then a she-cat from StarClan saved me . . ."

"Go on," urged Sharpfang. Icetail felt weird talking about it. After all, he had never really told anyone up until now. He never thought he'd be telling Sharpfang, of all cats.

"Well, at the end of the dream, I was engulfed by blood, and the sound of death was *everywhere*." He shuddered at the memory, and stood up, trying to get more comfortable. "It was terrible, Sharpfang. It really was. But that's not all. A few moons later, I went into the cave of mosses, and I found this . . . this tunnel."

"Where did it lead to?" Sharpfang asked.

"It lead to a lake below the ground," Icetail explained. He felt discomfort as all these memories surged back to his mind. "I fell into the lake by accident, and I had the same vision about blood and death when I started to drown . . . Flameheart—who was Flamepaw at the time—pulled me out just in time. The vision was only my imagination. But somewhere deep inside, I knew that it had meaning. It bothered me for moons and moons on end."

Sharpfang didn't say anything.

"And that's not all," Icetail went on. "Through everything that has happened, StarClan gave me a prophecy to consider. *The darkness was never meant to be, and two cats high and proud will lead and destroy.*"

Sharpfang's pelt bristled. "What does it mean, Icetail? What does this have to do with you?"

"The darkness that wasn't meant to be is DarkClan, I think," Icetail explained. "And the two cats involved, I think they are me and Dewstar." He looked down to his paws. "And there's one more dream I have had that I need to share with you."

"Tell me," Sharpfang said.

"Sweetheart and I both had the same vision . . . where Dewstar is on a rock, leading a Clan while they chanted his name, while I sat in shame below him." He clenched the ground with his claws. "It means that I'm the cat who's going to destroy. *I* am. I don't understand at all! I've never murdered my own Clanmates, or sabotaged other Clans! I'm nowhere as near as evil as Dewstar!"

"I didn't know you had this weight on your shoulders," Sharpfang whispered. "You've had a burden that you had to carry all by yourself."

"Now I have told you, the weight doesn't feel so heavy anymore," Icetail said honestly. He wondered if sharing his deepest thoughts and secrets was the right decision. After all, though Icetail took a new liking towards the older warrior, Sharpfang was still unpredictable.

"Does Brightstar or Sweetheart know about the prophecy?" Sharpfang asked.

"They both do. But you're the first cat I've ever told this." He sighed. "I haven't even told Flameheart or Silverleaf . . ."

Icetail looked up at the twinkling stars. The night was brilliant, especially now. He felt a little bit relieved all of the sudden. Sharing his burden with Sharpfang . . . he had to admit, it was a great feeling through all of the doubts. For moons, he had kept everything to himself up until now. A heavy feeling on his shoulders felt as if it were being lifted.

Silverleaf had once told him that sharing burdens with your Clanmates could always make you better. For the first time in two moons, he felt strong again. He looked at Sharpfang, wondering what he was going to say.

"Well, there's definitely a meaning to the prophecy," meowed the tom. "How do you know DarkClan is the darkness mentioned in that prophecy?"

"An elder's tale told me so," Icetail responded. "They say that DarkClan isn't an original Clan. They moved into this forest by force or something like that, and they always had made things hard for MarshClan, MoonClan, StreamClan and CloudClan. Even now, things are hard because of them."

"You're right," Sharpfang murmured. "That's an obvious point in the prophecy." He froze. "Wait. Do you think being the cat who is going to destroy is necessarily a *bad* thing?"

"I do," Icetail muttered bitterly.

"Have you ever thought about it?" Sharpfang pressed. He was staring deeply into Icetail's eyes.

Icetail shrugged. "Well, there's nothing really much to think about. When I think of destruction, I think about the end of the Clans."

"What if the destroying part of the prophecy had a different meaning than what you think?" Sharpfang pressed.

"Where are you going with this?" Icetail asked, turning to the older tom. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking . . . that maybe, being the cat who destroys is a good thing." Icetail's eyes widened, but Sharpfang continued before he could say anything. "The prophecy is about DarkClan, right? So, have you ever thought of you putting an end to DarkClan?"

Icetail kept on staring at him. "I don't get it."

"What I mean is, you are going to destroy DarkClan. Dewstar is leading it. Isn't it obvious?" Sharpfang went on. "Don't you see?"

Icetail's heart pounded hard in his chest. *How . . . how did he think of these things so quickly?* he thought with disbelief. *I've had this prophecy stuck in my head for countless moons, and Sharpfang, who had just heard about it tonight, found a possible answer!*

"I see," Icetail whispered.

Sharpfang purred. "Exactly."

"I should've talked to you moons ago about this," Icetail commented. "I don't know why I held a grudge against you in the first place. You really helped clear my mind, Sharpfang."

He nodded. "As long as it has helped you."

"Hey, why did you follow me out here anyway?" Icetail asked. "Not that I don't like this, but why are you also being nice to me? All my life, I'd only remembered you trying to cause trouble for me. But now, things *changed*. In ways I didn't expect, to top it all off."

"Because," Sharpfang began, wrapping his tail neatly around his paws before turning his eyes up to the sky. "Silverleaf asked me to talk to you. And also . . . I've been able to see the pain in other cats eyes. Ever since my kits were born, I've been like this. I've been very empathetic. And lately, I saw nothing but pain in your eyes, Icetail."

"And you wanted to help me?"

Sharpfang turned to him, resolve burning in his very essence. "Yes, I do. But I'm not the only cat who is trying to help you, Icetail. Don't you realize it? *Everyone* in MoonClan is trying to help you. We are all standing by your side, supporting you, keeping you strong and leading you in the right direction. We're all letting you lean on our shoulders and we were all always open to listen to what you had to say."

Icetail's eyes were on Sharpfang.

"Even though we all don't know what's really happening with you, everyone in MoonClan shares your burdens. You just don't realize it, Icetail." Sharpfang's gaze turned to Icetail. Determination filled into his eyes.

Out of all cats, Sharpfang. I never expected that it would be you who would give me strength once more, Icetail thought, speechless.

Chapter Forty Three

Edited ✔

By the morning, Icetail returned to camp, a little tired. It was barely dawn, so he was grateful for that as he and Sharpfang silently padded in the camp. Sweetheart, Silverleaf, Graywing and Sagepelt were all awake, quietly sharing tongues with each other and talking softly.

Their Clanmates were all still asleep, and those who idled around the clearing tried to remain as quiet as possible. He immediately caught Silverleaf's concerned gaze as he emerged through the camp entrance.

"There you two are!" she meowed with concern, padding up to his side. "I woke up and realized you were gone, and I was worried for a moment, Icetail . . ."

"Sharpfang and I were just looking around for good places to hunt," he lied, turned to the senior warrior. "CloudClan might be good. I should send a patrol there soon."

"Wait, Icetail," Silverleaf said. Icetail turned to her and looked down to her blue eyes. "Yesterday when you said you already ate, you really didn't, did you? I asked Sweetheart if you two shared prey, but she said no."

Icetail guiltily looked down. "Sorry. You and Dawnstripe looked hungry, I can't just let that pass."

"You're hungry too," she mewed, "I would've given you the prey. You know that."

"I'm fine," Icetail said. "Don't worry about me. I'll catch myself something to eat soon. I'm not *that* hungry, anyways."

Silverleaf searched his gaze, concerned. "Okay . . ."

He nodded. "Want to patrol with me today?"

"Sure," she meowed. "I'll start waking every cat up."

She gave him one last look of concern before making her way to the warriors den. He watched her as she gently woke her brother, Squirreltail, first, and then she went on to Redsky and the other warriors. He turned to Sagepelt and Sharpfang. The two were silently talking as they padded to the nursery.

Icetail sighed and looked at Sweetheart. "How's Swiftbreeze and Fireshade?" he asked the medicine cat, worried. He didn't want any more of his Clanmates to die.

"They're both getting better," Sweetheart murmured. "Come, want to see them? I've given them both medicine for whitecough in case it develops, and they seem to be improving. But if I had more herbs though, they'd be healing much quicker."

"We'll need to send out an herb-collecting patrol soon," Icetail commented. He looked inside the medicine den to see Swiftbreeze and Fireshade. The two were talking to each other, not looking that sick anymore. Though, every once in a while, Swiftbreeze would cough while Fireshade sniffled.

They seem to be recovering, he thought.

Grayfur padded up beside Icetail. "Can I lead a patrol?" she asked. "Silverleaf woke almost every cat."

"Sure," he replied. "Lead a border patrol by StreamClan. You can pick any cats you want to take."

Grayfur nodded and went to the warrior's den, already choosing three other warriors to take with her: Ashtail, Redsky and Hawkheart. Icetail went to the center of the clearing, and called everyone out of their dens when he saw that they were awake to assign the dawn patrols.

"Dawnstripe," Icetail meowed, "take your apprentice and a few other cats with you to DarkClan's borders to mark. You know what to do when you see them; make sure you do not engage, no matter what.

Can you also call the watch patrol back to camp?"

"Sure," Dawnstripe said. "Come on, Goldenpaw, we're going on a patrol. Shiningmoon, you should come with me. The less cats there'll be, the easier it is to hide."

"Volefur, take a hunting patrol near MarshClan," Icetail went on. "Skypelt, Blackpaw, you two should go with him." He felt energetic even though he was awake most of the night. *It's all because of Sharpfang's encouraging words,* he thought. *I completely misjudged him!*

"I'll take a patrol," Brightstar meowed, padding into the clearing out of her den. Her blue eyes reflected the rising sun's light, and her white pelt was an ungroomed mess. "I want to lead a hunting patrol near DarkClan. I'll take Rainwhisker and Petalfur with me."

Icetail nodded, knowing that he was unable to reject his leader's wishes anyway. "Alright. And I'll lead a border patrol near CloudClan," he meowed. "Silverleaf, Flameheart and Amberpaw will come with me."

"I can lead a hunting patrol," Sharpfang offered. "Shadowheart can come with me."

"That's barely a hunting patrol," meowed Brightstar. "You need at least *three* cats with you."

Swiftbreeze clambered into the clearing. "I know I'm not in my best condition right now, but I can go," she offered. "I feel stuffy just by staying in camp all day. Maybe a good run in the forest can clear my coughs."

"I'm okay with that," Sweetheart said. "I do think that Swiftbreeze can improve her health by trying a fresh day outside camp."

"You can go," Icetail said. "And if Fireshade is good too, he can maybe try and help take care of the elders and change their beddings."

"Alright," Sweetheart meowed, "Good thinking."

Brightstar purred to Icetail as he finished settling the Clan matters. "You seem rather lively," she commented. "I'm proud of you, Icetail. You're doing a good job this morning."

* * *

Icetail led his patrol through the undergrowth toward StreamClan. The sun was just above the trees, lighting up the entire forest up with its warm rays. For once this quarter moon, Icetail felt warm by the touch of the radiant light, accepting the feeling that he missed.

Almost every single oak tree in the forest had no leaves anymore, and the birds had already gone. He knew that mice hid in their burrows, and the squirrels slept in their dens. The only chances they would get at catching prey is by sheer skill and silence in moments of time when the prey would come out to eat—otherwise, they would have to go back to the Clan unsuccessful and sleep another day with empty bellies.

Ever since that fight from the gathering, they stole that piece of our territory rich with prey, Icetail thought with anger. *We need it back! DarkClan thinks they can do whatever they want, but I have to prove them wrong.*

He listened to his surroundings as the heathery scent of CloudClan became more and more clear. He could hear a running lake in the distance somewhere up ahead, along with the tempting tiny scrapes of the squirrels and mice that hid in the trees around him.

Amberpaw turned to Icetail, excited. "Look!" she meowed, pointing up ahead with her tail tip. Icetail turned, and saw two mice barely within the cover of fallen, crippled leaves. There was no wind right now, so the mice couldn't have a chance to scent them just yet.

"Try to catch them," Icetail challenged her. "Let me see how good of a hunter you are."

She nodded. "I'll try."

"Let's watch," Icetail whispered to Flameheart and Silverleaf. They nodded, and the three warriors padded into the undergrowth to

watch the apprentice's hunting skills.

Amberpaw had just become an apprentice about two moons ago, so she wasn't the best hunter yet. But with leaf-bare arriving already, she had improved dramatically just for the sake of her Clan. She was a good apprentice, and so were her littermates. Icetail overall liked training her, especially with bunting as she was always filled with determination.

Amberpaw crept up on the mice, her muzzle low and measured out with her body. In a swift movement, she darted from her spot and leaped at the prey. The mice squealed and tried to get away, but Amberpaw's claws hooked onto one of them, killing it. She scrambled after the next, but it already disappeared into a burrow underneath a hawthorn bush.

"Mouse-dung!" Amberpaw spat. "I could've caught that one too."

Icetail padded out of the undergrowth. "What are you frustrated about?" he asked. "You caught the first one. You should be proud."

She slumped back with disappointment. "But I missed the other one! That's totally going to cost the Clan."

Icetail sighed, and Flameheart padded up. "At least you caught the mouse," he commented. "Those was good skills, Amberpaw. I am impressed." He purred, and she nodded gratefully.

"Let's keep going," Silverleaf meowed, continuing their patrol. "The sooner we get back to camp, the sooner you can eat, Icetail."

"I'm not hungry, honestly," Icetail retorted. "It was my choice to give my share to you and Dawnstripe. She's depressed . . . and as hungry as you," he added. "That's not healthy for her."

"She must've really loved Dewstar," murmured Silverleaf, looking down to her paws. "I feel bad for her. If it were you who left to join the enemy Clan to take over ours, I'd be devastated." He was about to tell her how he'd never do that, but he suddenly got interrupted.

"Icetail," Flameheart called softly. He was peering over an elder bush. Amberpaw was right beside him. "There's a DarkClan patrol

walking in CloudClan territory."

Icetail bristled. "What? Who's leading the patrol?" he asked, silently padded forward to sit beside his friend. He looked and spotted a tom that he didn't know. Relief filled his belly. *Not Dewstar*, he thought with approval. *But CloudClan isn't going to like this!*

"What are they doing?" asked Silverleaf quietly, inching in next to Amberpaw. "It's unusual for DarkClan to cross into CloudClan."

"It's not unusual for DarkClan to trespass into *any* Clan," Flameheart retorted.

Icetail stood up. "Try not to be seen to well, but let's start marking the border," he ordered. "I don't want them to *accidentally* step over to our side." He padded to the start of the MoonClan border, and began to mark from the hawthorn bush from earlier.

The rest of his patrol crept from the undergrowth, and began to do as ordered. As he marked, he kept an eye on the DarkClan cats as they trekked through the territory. He watched as a white figure ran from a rabbit hole and into the moor. Immediately, one of the DarkClan cats began to chase after the rabbit, with the other three following close behind.

That rabbit is so fast! he thought with awe, staring with his eyes wide. *Do CloudClan cats actually chase them*? Icetail knew that no other Clan was faster than CloudClan. Their muscles were built for running—they were faster than any rabbit that Icetail had ever seen. But the DarkClan cats weren't going fast enough.

He stopped watching them and continued to mark his side of the border. *DarkClan hunting on CloudClan is their problem, not mine*, he decided. *I have MoonClan to take care of. I might as well leave it at that.*

He worked his way towards a dead birch tree, and just as he saw that the borders were marked strongly enough, he left and padded over to Silverleaf. As soon as he saw her, he felt guilty. He had never once told her about his role in the prophecy. He hadn't even been talking to Flameheart about his recent discoveries. He knew

deep down that he had to tell them pretty soon, or else they might find out and lose their trust in him.

Silverleaf looked up. "What are you doing here, Icetail? Are you done with your side?" she asked.

Icetail nodded, snapping out of his thoughts. "I am. Where's Amberpaw and Flameheart?" He looked around, and spotted his apprentice digging up for her mouse. He beckoned her over, and she trotted up, holding the prey between her teeth by its tail.

Flameheart padded up to them from behind Icetail. "I am right here. I finished my portion of the borders. What do we do now?" He tilted his head.

"I finished too," Amberpaw added, her mew muffled.

Icetail looked down to his paws in thought. He didn't want to tell Amberpaw about the prophecy, but he certainly wanted Silverleaf and Flameheart to know. After all, he finally found some kind of answer. Now was the right time to fill them in. Flameheart deserved to know due to his prior knowledge of it, and Silverleaf . . . well, she was Icetail's mate. It would be wrong to keep things a secret.

"Well?" Flameheart asked. "We haven't got all day."

Icetail nodded, knowing what he had to do. "Amberpaw, go to camp ahead of us and see if Fireshade needs help with the elders. We'll follow behind."

"Oh, okay," Amberpaw mewed, beginning to pad away. When he made sure she was gone, Icetail sighed deeply and sat down in front of his mate and friend.

"Listen," he said to the both of them. "There's something I must tell you."

"Tell us what?" Silverleaf asked, tilting her head.

Flameheart's eyes narrowed. "You have another answer to the prophecy, don't you, Icetail?" he asked. Flameheart's she searched Icetail's gaze, so he simply nodded.

"Prophecy?" Silverleaf's voice peaked with interest, her wide eyes watching Icetail intently.

"Yes, that's right," Icetail murmured. Silverleaf, confused, stared at Icetail. "I talked to Sharpfang about it—"

"You told Sharpfang?" Flameheart cut off. "You freely just . . . told him?"

"Icetail, Flameheart, I have not the slightest idea what is going on," Silverleaf snapped. "Tell me, I'm so confused!" Her blue eyes started to gleam with frustration.

Icetail sighed. He began to explain to her what he told Sharpfang the other night. Silverleaf listened with quiet shock as Icetail spilled to her his deepest secret—the prophecy of darkness. Flameheart took it all in, nodding gravely. He already knew about this. But when Icetail started telling him the things that he didn't know, Flameheart looked surprised as well.

Finally, he was telling them what he wanted to say all along. "And yesterday, I was sure that I was the enemy that the prophecy foretold—the one who will certainly destroy."

Silverleaf's claws sunk into the ground the ground. "You wouldn't do that!"

"But what do you have to say about *that*?" asked Flameheart, his gaze cool and collected. "You avoided admitting to me the truth for moons and moons. But it seems like you have some kind of answer."

Icetail looked at his friend. "Sharpfang gave me the answer," he said, his voice getting lower. "Dewstar is the leader of the darkness, as leader of the Clan. But I will destroy it, along with DarkClan!"

Relief filled into Silverleaf's eyes. But Flameheart wasn't getting sympathetic just yet. "How do you know for certain that you will succeed?" he prompted. "*How* are you going to defeat the darkness?"

Icetail froze. *How will I*? he thought with sudden dread.

"In order to defeat the darkness," Brightstar's voice rose up from the

bramble thickets, "we must defeat them in war."

"Brightstar!" Icetail exclaimed. "You were listening?"

"Amberpaw told me that you had sent her back to camp early when I asked her where you all were. I came here out of curiosity. I didn't expect to overhear this." Brightstar's tail flicked with interest. "The war between DarkClan and MoonClan has quieted down because they simply have a new leader. That one fight at the gathering two moons ago was simply Dewstar's test on our strength."

"How do you know all of this?" Icetail demanded.

"Every ambitious leader has the same intentions," Brightstar responded.

"But you're not ambitious like he is!" exclaimed Silverleaf.

"I was," Brightstar meowed. "But I grew old. And with age comes experience and understanding." She paused and looked up to the sky. "Now, I am positive that Dewstar will re-declare war. Once he does, we might have a huge battle, bigger than anything we have ever faced."

"But Brightstar—" Icetail began, but he was cut off by his leader.

"I've seen it in a dream when I first earned my nine lives seasons ago," Brightstar went on. "I saw the battle happening. I never knew when that battle would occur, but one thing I know for certain is how close it truly is to us now."

Icetail's eyes were wide. *But Featherbreeze hinted to me that I can resolve this* and *avoid battle*! he thought, his heart filling with dread. *She told me that I mustn't sink to Dewstar's level. And all my leader sees is battle to resolve this conflict!*

"Brightstar, I don't think fighting is the only way to fix this," Icetail expressed. "There can be another way."

"We can't talk our enemies to death," Brightstar snorted. "We have to start preparing every cat. Now I know that Dewstar is going to attack us soon, and we must be ready at all costs."

Icetail exchanged a worried glance with Silverleaf. *Battle is the last thing that I wanted to happen! Oh StarClan, is there any way to prevent this?*

Chapter Forty Four

Edited ✔

I made another long chapter. I haven't done this in a while lol ^o^ enjoy~

Icetail was leading his apprentice, Amberpaw, to the Training Hollow. Right beside him, Flameheart followed silently. Dawnstripe and Volefur spoke to one another in hushed tones as Blackpaw and Goldenpaw boasted about new battle moves they had recently learned.

Underpaw, the remains of the dead leaf-fall leaves cracked and cackled. Icetail's fur blew in the wrong direction by the cold wind, and the sky was dark and filled ominous clouds that promised to bring another storm. The scents of the forest surrounded Icetail as he led the party to the Training Hollow.

Not a single sound of prey was to be heard the whole way there. Icetail's head hung low. *Of course I can't hear or scent prey,* he thought sadly. His belly growled, and he hoped no cat heard. *I can't have Silverleaf finding out that I have been giving my prey away to my Clanmates. She'll get so mad at me.*

"Are you hungry, Icetail?" Amberpaw asked, trotting up beside him. She must have noticed despite his silent pleas.

Icetail shrugged and tried his best to mask his emotions. "We're all hungry. I don't need to eat now, so we'll all have a meal back at camp."

She nodded happily even though they both knew there wouldn't be enough food to go around. He was grateful to have Clanmates who would care if he was starved, but the last thing he wanted them to do was to risk their lives for his own well-being.

As soon as he entered inside the Training Hollow, he glanced

around. No matter what changes the forest was going through, *this* area never changed. It was as if this spot was the only that could never be found by the Twolegs, protected by the cats of StarClan themselves.

To Icetail, the Hollow would always be MoonClan's safe haven.

It had always excited him to return. He breathed in the stale scents of when he was last here, including all of the newer scents of his Clanmates who often came to battle-train.

I'm going to be here a lot more often, he thought. *Brightstar wasn't joking when she told me that we were going to train our warriors and apprentices more.*

Maybe that battle with DarkClan will be inevitable.

"What are we going to start off with now, Icetail?" Amberpaw asked eagerly, bounding over to him.

Blackpaw raced into the clearing, and Goldenpaw excitedly followed him. "Can we continue that move Volefur was teaching us last time?" Blackpaw asked. "The half-turn belly-rake?"

"No, I want to practice the duck-and-twist! I've been working on it, Dawnstripe," Goldenpaw meowed. "I want to show you how I perfected it!" Her eyes shone eagerly.

Amberpaw looked up pleadingly to Icetail. "Can we please do the jump and pin?" she meowed in a half-whine. "You promised to teach me that since last quarter-moon, Icetail!"

Icetail laughed softly. "Quiet down," he told all the apprentices. "We're going to start off with warm-ups so your muscles can loosen up. Volefur, would you like to lead them?"

"Sure thing," Volefur said. "Everyone, run three times around the clearing. Remember, long strides. This'll make you faster and it'll really get you fired up."

Blackpaw raced from his spot and began to do as told, but Goldenpaw dashed as quickly as possible, trying to pass him.

Amberpaw bolted from her position a few seconds after the two of them had began, snapping out of a daze. "No fair! You two got a head start!" she complained.

"Blackpaw, Goldenpaw, Amberpaw, this is *not* a race!" Volefur called.

Icetail turned his attention away from them. He looked at Flameheart. "This reminds me of my apprentice days," he purred to him. "All we would do is argue over what battle move we should learn. But we always had fun in the end."

Flameheart smiled. "You must have had a fun time as an apprentice. When *I* was still training, DarkClan was absolutely brutal." His gaze clouded as his smile faded. "If we did a move wrong, we'd get punished with some bone-shattering exercises. And we mostly fought with unsheathed claws."

"Why?" Icetail asked, his fur bristling.

"Because," Flameheart meowed, "Sandstar was crazy. I tried to trust her because she was my mother, but she was very unreasonable toward her Clanmates. I wonder how Dewstar is leading DarkClan now."

He didn't want to think of it, and steered away the topic. "My mother and Sandstar were sisters," Icetail said. "That means we're kin."

Flameheart nodded. "I know the story. I also knew at the time why Silverleaf and Squirreltail were stolen as kits. Don't forget, I was born and raised a DarkClan cat."

"But your loyalty will remain in MoonClan," Dawnstripe meowed, padding over. She smiled lightly. "You've proven yourself so many times to MoonClan already, no cat doubts your heart anymore. We all are in debt to you."

Flameheart dipped his head. "There's nothing for MoonClan to be in debt to me about," he said. "I am the one who owe them my life because Brightstar took me in, gave me my warrior name and kept

me with you all."

Icetail purred, thinking about it. *When Flameheart, Dewstar and I were apprentices, we all became warriors together because of the courageous deed we did to save MoonClan's kits,* he recalled. His heart ached at the thought of his brother. It never did well for him to recall their happier memories.

Volefur trotted up. "I finished warming them up," he reported, angling his ears toward the apprentices. "I think they are all filled with energy now."

Icetail looked at them, and almost laughed to see them all wrestling with each other, trying to pin each other down. "Amberpaw, Blackpaw, Goldenpaw, cut that out!" he called. "We're going to start battling training now!"

Amberpaw pushed away her brother and sister away ran up to her mentor. "Are we going to do the jump and pin like you promised?" she asked. "*Pleaaase*?"

"That depends on Dawnstripe. What do you want to do?" he asked her.

Dawnstripe ignored the apprentice's pleading gazes. "We'll start off easy," she began. "First, we have to practice our back kicks."

"What?" Goldenpaw groaned. "We did that last time!"

"Back kicks are good for balance," Dawnstripe retorted. "And they help build strength in our legs and paws. Besides, you *didn't* do it perfectly the last time. Can you demonstrate for us, Volefur?"

Volefur nodded. "Gladly. Flameheart, want to help me?"

"Sure," Flameheart meowed, walking into the clearing. "I have to have my back turned, right?"

"Yeah, that's right. It's the proper way to do it," Volefur meowed. Flameheart moved his body as instructed and braced himself. Volefur burst from his spot, quickly estimating the distance it would take to perform an effective back kick. When he got to a good

distance, he lashed out his hind legs, taking all the weight in with his front paws, and slammed his paws onto Flameheart's back, knocking the flame-colored warrior over.

"Wow, that was cool!" Blackpaw meowed.

"It would be cool for me, but I already learned that trick," muttered Goldenpaw. She sighed, and turned to Dawnstripe. "If I prove that I know this move, can I do something cool, like the duck-and-twist?"

"Maybe," Dawnstripe meowed. "Practice it on me, and I'll determine whether or not your estimations and balance is good enough for a *real* battle. I suggest all apprentices and mentors should work together, too."

"Okay," Blackpaw said, padding over to Volefur.

"I'll observe," Flameheart said, walking around the groups.

Icetail and Amberpaw gathered together, and he sat down with his back turned. "Make sure you keep your claws sheathed," he advised. "I don't want any bloodshed."

No matter how much we train, we'll never be like DarkClan, he thought with determination.

"Got it," Amberpaw exclaimed. She got onto her forepaws, trying to balance, and then turned to Icetail, grunting with effort. "Is this . . . good?" she asked, getting in a position that could land a back kick.

"You're almost there." Icetail nodded. "Try it on me. Let me see how strong your kick is."

He braced himself and in a swift moment, Amberpaw brought down her hind legs and kicked hard onto her mentor, her back claws digging into his flesh. He held back a yowl of pain. "Be careful! Sheathe your claws!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry—" Amberpaw began. "I didn't mean to!"

Icetail sighed, turning over to lick clean the scratch. "I-it's nothing. We can continue. But please remember not to unsheathe your

claws, Amberpaw." He looked at her disapprovingly. "Hurting your Clanmates is against the warrior code, remember that. Our rivals are Clans who we don't share our hunting grounds with-those are the cats we *really* fight."

"*None* of the Clans share our hunting grounds," Amberpaw pointed out.

"Exactly," Icetail said. "So that means you're only allowed to unsheathed your claws towards them, alright? So now that you've shown me that your kick is strong, let's get a second opinion." He turned around. "Flameheart, how do you think she did?"

Flameheart nodded of approval. "I think she can do better, like Goldenpaw. Her sister's kick was stronger. But Amberpaw was extremely good at estimating, and she shows that she understands the movement. I don't think she has to work on it more."

Amberpaw looked eager. "Did I really do well?" When Flameheart nodded, her eyes lit up. "So that doesn't mean I have to practice it anymore! So what move are we going to do now, Icetail? Are we going to do what we all wanted?"

Icetail looked at Dawnstripe and Volefur to see that they both finished working with their apprentices as well. "Blackpaw did just as well as his sisters," Volefur commented. "I don't think that they have to practice it anymore. And last time, we taught the apprentices the upright lock. So I think we cleared that move too."

Icetail nodded. "Okay. Let's do the duck-and-twist move first. It's simpler than the other things you wanted to try."

"Yes!" Goldenpaw cheered. "I'll show you how well I'm at it now, Dawnstripe. You'll see."

Her mentor rolled her eyes and took her place in the center of the clearing. "I'll demonstrate," Dawnstripe meowed. "I think I'm best at it."

She ducked and twisted around swiftly, with movement as quick as a rabbit. Amberpaw watched, amazed at the warrior's speed as she

rolled over on her back. Then, she sprung to her paws. "This is a dodging move. Warriors don't want to or need to fight all the time, and a simple dodge isn't enough to escape an attack. So the ideal way to this move is with great speed and agility."

"That was amazing," Goldenpaw gasped. "Let me try!" She ducked and twisted down, but she fell onto her belly, scrambling up. "Wait, I slipped. Let me try again!"

"You need it perfect," Dawnstripe said, shaking her head. "I would of clawed your ears off by now if I were an enemy."

Goldenpaw sighed. "I really *have* been practicing it! Let me just try again." She tried the move again, and when she rolled over, it took her a moment to get up.

"You did better this time," Icetail observed. "You just need to be quicker. Amberpaw, Blackpaw, you two try it. The sooner we clear this move, the sooner we can do the other two moves that you wanted to learn."

He watched the apprentices immitate Goldenpaw and Dawnstripe. Amberpaw looked funny as she tried to be fast, and it took Blackpaw a hard time for him to get up after doing the move.

But in enough time, both apprentices did it correctly. Goldenpaw swiped at Amberpaw as she ducked away. And just as Goldenpaw was about to leap onto her, Amberpaw swiftly rolled over, dodging both attacks with one move. Volefur tried it with Blackpaw, and the dark-furred apprentice did it as well as his sisters.

"There are minor flaws," Icetail meowed, "but I'd say as long as the enemy doesn't catch you, you are good to go with your duck-and-twists."

"What next?" demanded Blackpaw. Energy was pulsing through the young tom. He could see it through the look in Blackpaw's eyes.

Icetail decided what next to do quickly. "We will practice the half-turn belly-rake, like you wanted, Blackpaw."

"I thought we were doing the jump and pin!" Amberpaw

complained.

"Quit your yapping—" Blackpaw began, but Volefur cut him off before the two apprentices began arguing.

"I'll demonstrate the move." Annoyed by the two apprentice's content kit-play, he flicked his tail dismissively. "And Amberpaw, we will do your move after we finish Blackpaw's. Just be patient."

Amberpaw sighed and slumped back. "Sorry, Volefur."

Volefur nodded of approval, and went to work. "So here's how to do it," he began. Icetail sat back to watch. "It's like the belly rake; where you claw against the soft of your enemy's belly. That move, however, is only ideal when they've got you pinned down. The half-turn belly-rake, on the other paw, is different because you can only use it when you are at the advantage of the fight. Here, I'll show you how to do it."

Without warning, Volefur darted from his spot and lunged at Icetail. Swiftly, the warrior turned to his side, slipping under Icetail's belly, and pretended to rake it with sheathed claws. Then as fast as he could, Volefur turned back on all fours out from under him. Icetail lost his balance and tripped over.

"Ouch," he groaned.

"Sorry," Volefur apologized. He purred as he helped Icetail up. "I wanted to do it as a surprise to show the apprentices that it's not easy."

"That was cool!" Blackpaw exclaimed. "Especially since Icetail tripped over. That'd make you so much stronger if he were an enemy; Icetail would be shredded if he were a DarkClan cat!"

"Don't say that about him!" gasped Goldenpaw. "Icetail is the Clan deputy! It's an honor enough that he's here watching us practice battle moves."

Icetail purred. "Nonsense, Goldenpaw. But Blackpaw is right—if I *were* a DarkClan cat, I'd be dead. The half-turn belly-rake completely dominated me!"

Suddenly, Icetail heard another presence. He turned to the entrance of the Training Hollow to see his mate, Silverleaf, padding up to him. Her gray-silver pelt shone, and her tail flicked in greeting. "What's this I hear of the half-turn belly-rake?" she asked. "I'm the master at that move!"

"Is that so, Silverleaf?" Amberpaw asked. "You'll have to show it to us one day!"

Icetail purred and touched his nose to her's. She sat right beside him, their pelts brushing. "Well anyways, we finished patrolling early so I decided to stop by and watch you all train," she announced.

"That's fine by me," Blackpaw meowed over his shoulder. "Watch me, Silverleaf! Volefur's is teaching us the half-turn belly-rake!" He copied Volefur's move, slipping down underneath Goldenpaw's belly and pretending to swipe at her, but he wasn't fast enough to move out of the way. Goldenpaw crushed him with her weight. Blackpaw fought back, kicking her over. The two wrestled with each other, but Dawnstripe cut in between the two with annoyance, grabbing Goldenpaw by the scruff to drag her off her brother.

"No fooling around while we teach!" she meowed, spitting the apprentice she-cat back into the floor. She quickly scrambled up to her paws in embarrassment.

"Goldenpaw started it!" Blackpaw blurted out.

"No, *you're* the one who dove under *me*. Don't except that I won't fight back!" Goldenpaw retorted.

Icetail growled. "You two, since arguing is your favorite hobby, I suppose today isn't a good time to be learning the half-turn belly rake," he threatened. Blackpaw's eyes widened with disbelief. "Instead, we will do the jump and pin like Amberpaw wanted."

"What?" groaned Blackpaw. "There's nothing special about *that*! All you do is jump and pin a cat!"

"There's more to the move than that," Flameheart objected.

"What Flameheart said is true," Silverleaf agreed.

"I'll demonstrate this move," Icetail said, standing up. "The move itself is actually very complicated, Blackpaw. It takes strength and good concentration."

Blackpaw sat back, now getting a little curious. Icetail nodded of approval, and dashed from his spot, racing toward the nearest tree trunk. He leaped into the air, backwards, and bounced off its surface, landing squarely on Volefur's shoulders with exact precision.

Volefur gasped with surprise, and landed flat on his belly. "Hey!" he called.

Icetail *mrrowed* of laughter. "I got you back, Volefur." Then, he turned to look at the apprentices, whose eyes were wide with awe. "See, I told you it was complicated, Blackpaw. The hardest part is the measurement."

"How's the measurement hard?" Amberpaw asked.

Flameheart spoke up. "It's hard because the point is to weaken your opponent. We have to crush them underpaw, but there'd be much more action if it were a real battle."

Silverleaf nodded in agreement. "And the backward part takes a lot of effort, too. You'll know where you have to jump, at what time, to land exactly where you need!"

Icetail felt grateful for the support of the fellow warriors. "Okay, apprentices. Let's get training!"

* * *

By the time Amberpaw, Goldenpaw and Blackpaw were good enough at the jump and pin move, the sun was sinking down into the horizon. Icetail knew that it would rain later because of the fresh and heavy scent that remained throughout the forest, and because of the cold dew stuck to his pelt from the dampened forest.

Icetail, Silverleaf, Flameheart, Dawnstripe, Volefur and the

apprentices were headed toward the river to have a drink of water. They were all tired from a hard day of training, but Icetail felt that he was loosing energy much too fast. He was starved, and he didn't feel like he could give it his all anymore.

He padded on, his head hanging low. Silverleaf was following close behind him before padding up to him, her gaze concerned. "Is there anything wrong?" she asked, her voice quiet and small.

"I'm fine," Icetail responded. "Just parched."

That was true at least—but he wouldn't want to tell her that he was hungry. She would give up her own share for him, and he didn't want that.

When they got to the river, he was relieved. He crouched by the water, lapping it up. It felt good when the river water filled in his belly, and when he wasn't thirsty anymore, he stopped drinking, satisfied. The fur on the bottom of his lip was wet, but he didn't care.

"It's so good!" purred Amberpaw. "I can never get over this river water. Much better than wet moss balls!"

Icetail nodded with agreement. "The first time I was out of camp, I had a good taste of this water too—" he was cut off. Suddenly, his stomach began to hurt badly. Icetail cringed, coughing. He vomit out the water he drank, and everyone ran to him, worried.

"Icetail, what's wrong?" gasped Dawnstripe. "Did you swallow something bad?"

Silverleaf was at his side at an instant. "Icetail—are you okay?" she asked, crouching by him.

Icetail gave a tiny nod. "I-I'm fine . . ."

"We have to take him to the medicine cat!" Amberpaw squeaked. "Look how awful he looks!"

Flameheart padded beside him, Volefur on the other side. "Icetail, lean on me. We will help you back."

Icetail looked back and forth between them, feeling pressured. He felt terrible. *I must of pushed my hunger by drinking the water from the river*, he thought. He leaned between Volefur and Flameheart, knowing he couldn't argue. "I'm fine," he rasped. "Maybe there was something in the water."

Silverleaf's eyes grew concerned. "We both know that the water was fine," she mewed. "You're probably hungry. Let's get you to Sweetheart and find you something to eat."

Icetail sighed and looked to his paws. "I suppose that'd be nice." He still didn't want to admit that he was hungry to her, but he couldn't argue with so little energy. Flameheart began to let them lead them through the forest back to the camp, but Icetail's paws felt weak. His legs wobbled unsurely with each step as if he were a newborn kit again. Before he knew it, he was on the forest floor again, his mind hazy and the vision around him going dark. He couldn't hear what his friends were saying anymore, but he could tell they were alarmed.

The last thing he saw was Silverleaf before his world had gone completely dark.

* * *

Icetail woke once more in the camp. Sweetheart and Amberpaw were standing worriedly over him, and Brightstar was right beside him along with Silverleaf. He could hear his Clanmate's shocked mews. Instantly, a jolt of pain hit Icetail in his belly. He groaned in pain, cringing once more.

"What's wrong with him?" demanded Silverleaf, her eyes wide. Her eyes scanned his entire pelt. "There's no thorns—no bugs—"

Sweetheart silenced Silverleaf with a flick of her tail. "He's hungry, that's all." She looked over to the fresh-kill pile. "Amberpaw, go get Icetail something good. He needs to eat."

Silverleaf crouched by him. "Why didn't you tell us that your stomach was the problem?" she asked softly. "I was so worried for you. I would've given up my prey for you in a heartbeat, Icetail."

He managed a raspy purr. "That's alright. I'll be fine after Sweetheart tends to me."

Amberpaw returned, holding a plump vole between her jaws. "This was the best I could find," she reported. She dropped the vole at Icetail's paws, and nudged it close to him. "Eat up, Icetail! You haven't got all day to heal!"

"She's right." Brightstar's mew rose from the surrounding cats. "We can't have our deputy neglecting his work because he is hungry."

Icetail nodded, sitting himself up. He took a small bite of the vole, and choked it down. The meat felt good in his belly. It was warm, indicating that some cat had just caught it. He could smell Squirreltail's scent all over it, and felt grateful that his Clanmates managed such a great catch.

"He'll be okay, right?" Icetail heard Blackpaw whisper to Goldenpaw.

Goldenpaw snorted. "Of course he will!" meowed the she-cat. "He's the Clan deputy."

"But he's still a cat with the same abilities and limitations as us," retorted Blackpaw.

Icetail flashed a glance over to them, making them hush down. The two looked down to their paws with embarrasment. Icetail simply got back to his vole, eating in slow bites, savoring the taste.

Sweetheart shooed everyone away. "Give him space to breathe!" she snapped. "He can't recover with his Clanmates all over his back!" Reluctantly, the apprentices left first before being followed by the warriors. The only cats who remained with him were Silverleaf and Brightstar.

They both talked silently to one another, pelts close and meows hushed. He strained to hear what they were saying, but their voices sounded seemed too muffled. Icetail decided to let it go and return to his delicious meal. He ate until he finished, burying the scraps and bones. *Thank you StarClan,* he silently prayed.

Sweetheart padded over, dropping some herbs in front of him. "Lap that up," she ordered. "It's going to help bring down your bellyache."

"Alright," meowed Icetail. "Hey, how long was I out?" He leaned over, beginning to lap up the leaves as she ordered. They tasted bitter; Icetail hated it. He reluctantly swallowed. At least they'd make him feel better.

Sweetheart shrugged. "Not that long. You were only gone for a moment. As soon as Volefur and Flameheart set you down in camp, you woke up."

He nodded. "I wish that portion of MoonClan territory were never stolen," he muttered darkly. "If we kept it, then maybe none of us would be starved. I'm not the only one."

"I know," Sweetheart replied. "But Brightstar will know the best time to take it back."

"When will that be?"

"When the Clan is ready, I suppose." Sweetheart beckoned Icetail toward the warrior den. "Go ahead, get your sleep. Tomorrow you're going to have to get straight back to your regular duties—no objections. And I don't want to see you neglecting meals again, understood?"

I'm not a kit, Icetail thought crossly. "I know, I know," he murmured, groggily crawling into his nest. He was still exhausted. Being hungry had made him tired, especially after a long day of battle training. But at least now he had some warm food in his belly.

I'll make do of this feeling and savor it, he decided. *I'm sorry, Silverleaf. I shouldn't of made you worry like that.*

Chapter Forty Five

Edited ✔

This chapter won't have much dialogue at first. But this is because I'm *always* using dialogue, lol! Let me try something different for once. Hopefully you'll all like it!

It was dawn already. Icetail had already sent out the dawn patrols when he decided that he wanted to hunt.

He silently padded out of the camp. *I'm sure if I bring some good prey, Brightstar won't mind me being alone,* he decided. No cat noticed him go, because mostly everyone was already gone, except for Mousetail, the other elders, Sagepelt and her kits, and a few other warriors who were still sleeping. Every cat who had left camp had been energetic this morning. He wondered if they were simply doing it for his sake.

He walked through the undergrowth, catching the different scents all around him. He could smell frost—it stung his nose, making him unable to smell anything else that could have been useful. He then payed more mind to the things he'd be able to hear instead. He was better at doing that anyways.

Icetail padded up a slope, gripping hard with his claws so he wouldn't slip down. He listened to everything around him. From his vantage point, he overlooked the dying forest, everything dark and gray and still. The wind was blowing lightly, whipping in his face. He could smell the moorland, heather and stale rabbit-holes. *CloudClan.*

He decided not to go in that direction; Icetail had already set out a hunting patrol over there. He turned away from CloudClan's borders, padding elsewhere. The MoonClan forest felt so familiar to him, it was easy for him to whip past trees and weave through dead bushes without bumping into anything.

But suddenly, he smelled something. Icetail stopped short. A small tang of mouse was made out just below some bramble thickets. Slowly, Icetail lightly pawed his way over to the thickets. He heard the mouse scuffling under the roots. There was a hole large enough for Icetail to squeeze through to get to it.

Icetail slipped down the hole, and spotted the mouse easily. He ducked behind dry and cold grass, hoping that it would cover his scent so the mouse wouldn't scent him. When the right time came, he leaped at it, catching its tail with his paw.

The mouse screached, trying to get away, but Icetail killed it with a bite to its spine. Satisfied, Icetail looked at the hole, intending to get out. Slowly, he padded over so he wouldn't get a thorn stuck in his pelt from the thickets. But suddenly, the ground beneath him crumbled. He gasped. *StarClan, I'm going to fall!* he thought, suddenly terrified.

He lost his footing and fell down deeper within the hole. He landed roughly on his paws, sending shivers throughout his whole body. "Fox-dung!" he spat, looking up. The exit was far too high for him to reach. He shouldn't of come down here—he should of felt the ground beneath him was hollow.

Then, Icetail looked around him. His eyes adjusted easily to his surrounding, mainly because a little bit of light was filtering through the top. There was a tunnel leading somewhere else. He turned fully. "How else am I going to get out of here?" he muttered to himself, staring at the tunnel.

He looked back up at the hole and growled, clenching the ground with his claws. It was *too* far up. Why'd he have to fall down here for a *mouse*? He sighed with annoyance, and turned to the tunnel, beginning to trek into the darkness.

He tried to look around, wondering where he was, but it was no use. He was in complete and utter darkness. Is this what it felt like to be blind? He reached out to his other senses—taste, smell, hearing, and touch. The air tasted of heather, washed by wind and a small tang of river-scent as well. He could hear the echo of his own paw-steps going farther down the tunnel, nothing clear ahead. He

could feel his whiskers touching each side of the walls, making sure he wouldn't bump in to anything as he became closed in. It made him uncomfortable and his heart began to beat faster.

He strained harder to see, but it was still no use. As Icetail continued walking, he wondered if it was right to come down here in the tunnel. Maybe he just should've waited for a patrol to come and help him up? Then, it hit him how embarrassing it would be to him for falling in such a place.

The footing beneath him began to change as he continued his way. The smooth moist dirt ground was turning rocky and rough. *Am I getting near the end of the tunnel?* he thought, hoping that the exit was near. There was a stale scent of cat. He stopped short, his fur rippling with unease.

The stale scent had only passed from a few days time. Had some cat been in here before him, a few days ago? If so, who? He tried to pay closer attention to the scent, but he couldn't. It was already too stale and washed-away.

He held the mouse he had caught tighter in his mouth. Where was he, anyway? Since when was there a tunnel, other than the one he had found moons ago, under MoonClan territory? Was there something Icetail and his Clanmates didn't know about their territory?

Icetail forced himself to continue walking downward. If there was a cat down here, there's bound to be an exit, right? Nervously, he padded on. Soon, he began to see light filtering in the tunnel. *Is that the way out*? he wondered.

"Who's there?" a voice snapped.

Icetail jumped, startled. So there *was* some other cat down here!

"I said it once, but I'm not saying it again," the voice went on.

"Brightstar?" Icetail asked with surprise, recognizing the she-cat's voice. He squinted through the darkness, making out a pair of blue eyes staring right back at him.

"Icetail! What are you doing down here?" Brightstar asked with surprise.

"Err, I was hunting. And I fell down this hole," he meowed, and tilted his head. "What about you? What are *you* doing down here?"

Brightstar's tail lashed with irritation. "I was following a scent trail, and it led down here."

Curiosity sparked in Icetail's amber eyes. "Whose scent trail was it?" he asked. "I found a stale scent not too long ago."

"How stale was it?" Brightstar demanded.

"I don't know. A few days, perhaps," he responded. "Whose scent trail was it, Brightstar?"

Brightstar sighed. "I suppose I can tell you, since you are my deputy. I've been scenting some DarkClan cats lately. I think . . . that there's a spy near MoonClan's camp."

Icetail's eyes widened. "What makes you think that?"

She sat down, and mewed, "Lately, DarkClan never needs me to fill how we are doing at gatherings. Dewstar always just knows. He has a knowing look in his eye, and he even once called me a liar. More importantly, I found scents in the trees, too."

Icetail thought hard about it. "Well, for the past few days I *have* been smelling DarkClan's scent," he murmured with realization. "I thought it was just the wind."

"But it's *not* the wind, Icetail," Brightstar insisted. "I followed the tree scents toward this part of the forest, and I found an entrance to this tunnel from a hollow of a birch tree."

"Birch trees have hollows?" he mewed with surprise. He always thought they were too narrow to have places to hide underneath them. The most likely cause for this could be the territory, losing its own footing due to the Twoleg construction.

"Apparently so." Her voice grew harder. "I figured out that DarkClan

had been finding a way in our territory without our knowledge by going through these tunnels. They didn't even need to cross the borders!"

"Then we have to block them!" he gasped. "We can't have Dewstar's warriors finding out about our business! They already think they can trespass enough!"

Brightstar shook her head. "No," she meowed. "You have to be smart about this. A true leader must think about the Clan's well-being first. Normally, a cat's first option would be to block these tunnels . . . but I see more ways how to do this."

Icetail thought about it. Suddenly, he finally caught on. "Oh." He took a breath. "You mean that would cause more danger."

"Yes, it would," Brightstar said. "First, I'm going to search these tunnels and find proof. Then, I will announce it to the Clan about what I had found. If Dewstar knows that we knew about these tunnels, he might find another way to sneak onto our territory unnoticed. So I'm going to tell the Clan to get stronger, *look* stronger, and handle private matters as if we were always at the gathering place."

"How do you suppose we would do that?" Icetail asked her.

"I want to discuss this at camp," Brightstar meowed. "Right now, we should look around the tunnels and see where the other passage leads. The one ahead where you were coming from is toward is MoonClan, the direction I came in from."

He nodded. "Okay. Let's get going, then." He set down his mouse. "Hopefully, nothing will find this piece of prey."

Brightstar nodded. "Hopefully."

She abandoned her spot, and dashed straight into the darker tunnel, which had a slope leading downward. He followed his leader without hesitation, skidding down carefully after her. Small pebbles tumbled down with him, scraping his paw pads.

He watched Brightstar as she confidently strode into the darkness.

She's so fearless, he thought with awe. *I would've never come up with such a smart plan. I'd never be a better leader than she. I wonder where all her confidence comes from?*

He ran up, padding right by her side. His whiskers brushed the side of the cave wall, indicating that the space was closing in once more. Something inside Icetail's belly stirred. It was a feeling of uneasiness. He had never got over his hatred of confined spaces, and right now, the area was seemingly getting more claustrophobic with each paw step they took.

"I wish we could see," muttered Icetail, trying to take his mind away from the fact that they were in a small space.

Brightstar flicked her tail onto his ear. "Focus on your hearing," she said softly. "You have the best hearing senses in the Clan. I have good smelling senses. Let's not rely on our vision for once to listen and scent."

Icetail nodded, and set out his senses. He could hear faint water dripping ahead, and little scuffles of the things that dwell in the tunnels. "I hear something," he whispered to her. "It sounds like something is moving."

"There are probably bats down here," she replied, just as quiet as him. "They have good hearing too. Let's try not to bother them."

He nodded, and followed his leader, keeping his nose on her tail so he wouldn't loose her. As they continued to walk, he noticed something. "Brightstar," Icetail meowed again. "Our paw steps are starting to echo. This must mean we're near a cave."

She nodded with agreement and added, "I smell water."

"Water?" Icetail asked with surprise. "Why would there be water here?"

Brightstar stopped short, making Icetail bump into her rump. She smelled the air, jaws parted and head tilted upward before dashing forward and calling over her shoulder, "Follow me!"

Icetail ran after her, careful not to crash into the wall. He chased

after his leader, wondering what she had scented. As Icetail went further down the tunnel, he began to notice the water scent too. He could also hear more dripping. So that's where those sounds were coming from!

Finally, he noticed his leader stop short once more and came to a short stop. "Icetail. Come look at this," she breathed.

He padded after her with curiosity and a bit of worry. Suddenly, he saw something beyond what he expected to see. A large pond-like pool of water was in the center of a large cave, which creased high into the ceiling. All types of scents flooded into the cave—scents of wind and heather, pine and grass, a fishy river scent, and the smell of the undergrowth and oak trees.

He stared at the pool of water with horror.

He'd been here before! He remembered when he had fallen in when he was an apprentice. His memories of it were terrible—the water was doused in blood, as if every cat in the Clans had died here, and he felt suffocated from nearly drowning. Though it was moons ago, the memory made him gasp for breath as if he were drowning again.

Then, he remembered one more thing. There was another tunnel led to the cave of mosses—which was completely destroyed—and a final tunnel that led straight into DarkClan territory. So there were DarkClan cats spying, after all!

And it seems like this cave connects to all the Clans, he thought with unease.

The crystal blue water sparkled like a mirage, rippling softly. Paw-steps started to echo down one of the tunnels, causing his fur to stand on edge. "Brightstar!" he hissed softly.

She nodded, and Icetail knew she must've heard it too. They both ducked behind dry grass and rocks, their pelts merging with the cool gray rock and dark shadows, and waited for whoever was approaching. Finally, two cats emerged into the cave.

He recognized one of the cats immediately. Dewstar! What was DarkClan's leader doing down here? Pain filled his heart as he saw his brother once more, followed by anger and fear and unease all at once.

"So?" Dewstar meowed to the other cat he was with. "Now we are away from the Clan, tell me what you've seen. What are MoonClan's most recent activities, Redclaw?"

Icetail squinted his eyes in the darkness. He made out a ginger-furred tom with a long tail, small ears, but long limbs. He had the appearance of an ideal tree-climber. No wonder he had been spying on MoonClan from the tree-tops!

"Well," Redclaw began. "MoonClan is suffering from hunger. Their lack of prey is worse than ours, I am happy to say. They are training more often, and Icetail had collapsed of hunger just a few days ago."

"Is he dead?" Dewstar asked, his voice quickening.

Icetail flinched at his brother's words. They were harsh, as if he didn't care at all, but there was something else behind his words that Icetail couldn't catch. The pain in his heart for his brother gripped him harder, like claws digging into flesh. *We're supposed to be brothers! Don't tell me that Dewstar's love for me was fake?* I *loved him as my brother!*

Even though Dewstar was long gone from MoonClan by now, the thought that his memories as an apprentice could be meaningless scared him.

"No, he's not. I don't think he will die, anyways," Redclaw meowed. "He looked fine yesterday night when he was sleeping." Redclaw's voice grew sharper. "But the amount they are training their warriors and apprentices is troublesome. They go the training hollow at least four to five times every quarter-moon. If the Clan has a lot of energy, it can even go up to six days."

"That's a lot!" Dewstar growled. "That means I'm going to have to raise the amount of days I train my cats, too. It should be every

single day, from now on."

"Every day?" exclaimed Redclaw. "You'll kill us!"

"Relax," Dewstar spat in response, turning to the pool of water so that he didn't face Icetail anymore. "Cats haven't been dying ever since I was a leader. I am not like Sandstar. She was a proud fool. I am proud, but I am no fool."

"Sandstar was sick, she couldn't help her mental issues," Redclaw defended. "You're her kin, aren't you?"

Dewstar shrugged. "Anything else?"

Redclaw nodded. "Just a few. MoonClan's current conditions are weak, even though they keep their border markers strong. And their leader, Brightstar . . . I think she is noticing our presence in her territory."

Dewstar flicked his tail dismissively. "Thank you for your report, Redclaw. I know everything I need. Now leave me be while I think."

Redclaw dipped his head in respect. "Be back soon, Dewstar."

Icetail narrowed his eyes. *Just what are you planning to do, Dewstar?* he thought with pure anger.

He seemed like he wanted to bring MoonClan to bloodshed!

* * *

Icetail and Brightstar returned home unnoticdd later on when Dewstar had finally left the cave. Icetail caught a vole on the way back, and Brightstar managed to catch a scrawny blackbird. The mouse he had earlier was cold and small, but he took it back with him anyways. At least the Clan would be fed.

As he entered the camp, he spotted that most cats were there already. They must be done with their dawn patrols. He looked up in the sky, realizing that it was sun-high right now. Now would be a time for every cat to share tongues, and eat their meals.

Brightstar and Icetail padded to the fresh-kill pile, dropping their catches. Amberpaw immediately ran up to him. "Where were you?" she exclaimed. "While you were gone, Dawnstripe put me on dumb apprentice duties!"

Icetail's tail flicked. "I was hunting."

"Why didn't you take me with you?" she complained.

"I had to talk with Brightstar, that's why," he meowed, purring. "Anyways, it was good you did duties. This means you won't have to do them tomorrow. Every other day, remember? What did you do for apprentice duties, anyways?"

Amberpaw groaned with annoyance just by thinking about it. "I cleaned the elder's bedding, picked ticks and fleas from their pelts, and plucked *all* the feathers off of a jay for Sagepelt and the kits to eat! It was a pain, Icetail."

He purred. "I'm sure it was." Glancing around, and spotted his mate, Silverleaf. "Go to Sweetheart's den and see if she needs help with anything. I'm going to go."

"More apprentice duties!" she exclaimed with an exasperated sigh, stomping over to the medicine den.

With slight amusement, his whiskers twitched before he turned and made his way to Silverleaf. She was grooming her pelt silently. As he got by her side he licked the ruffled fur between her ears and she looked up with surprise, just noticing him.

"Hi Silverleaf," he greeted.

She leaned in his chest with a purr. "There you are. I was wondering where you'd wandered off to!"

"Just hunting," he replied. "I caught a vole we could share."

"That's good to me," she said with approval.

But before they could even make their way to the fresh-kill like, Brightstar's voice rang around the clearing. "All cats old enough to

catch their own prey, gather around!"

Icetail looked up, surprised. Brightstar's head was held high and her eyes shone with defiance and determination, looking up into the trees as if checking for Redsky. *Is she going to tell every cat what happened?* he thought.

He stood up and beckoned Silverleaf forward, finding a place in the center of the clearing to sit. If that was the case, he was eager for his Clanmates to figure out the truth, as it would benefit them with their fight for survival against DarkClan.

Finally, we won't have to be one step behind them anymore! he thought, thinking back to Dewstar's figure in the cave. *We won't have to succumb to your darkness.*

Chapter Forty Six

Edited ✔

Brightstar stared down upon the Clan from the Moonrock, scanning her Clanmates with careful and watchful eyes. "I have gathered you all here to tell you of a discovery Icetail and I found outside of camp," she began.

Icetail noticed a few of his Clanmates looking at the two of them, whispering towards one another with curiosity and suspicion. He didn't let that bother him, as he knew they were going to figure out the truth shortly.

I wonder if Brightstar feels that we are being spied on, he thought. The feeling of being watched made him shudder. *No. Brightstar wouldn't be announcing this if she knew we were being watched at this moment.*

Silverleaf pressed closer to him, probably thinking that he was cold.

"First off, I want to say that our battle-training is doing very well," she began. "I have no intentions in reducing the amount of fight training we do, but I also want to start teaching the kits defensive moves."

Sagepelt gasped and stood up with a jolt. "I can't let my kits start battle training!" she objected. "They're barely two moons old!"

Icetail looked over at the nursery where both of her kits clambered out eagerly. Shadekit and Berrykit looked up at the Moonrock with excitement. "Would we really be battle training?" Shadekit called with excitement. "This means we'll be leaving the camp, right?"

"Yes! Yes!" cheered Berrykt. "That'll be the best thing *ever*!"

"No way, Brightstar! I *won't* let my kits battle train!" Sharpfang put in to Sagepelt's defense. "They're barely the size of full-grown rabbits."

Brightstar's ears flicked, silencing them. "You are misunderstanding me. I'm not going to battle train them, I want them to learn how to properly defend themselves." She flicked her tail to the elder's den. "And I want them learning, too."

"We can't train," retorted Mousetail from the elder's den. "I'm limp on one leg, Stripeeyes can barely see, and Thrushclaw's very frail."

"I can train, you old furball!" said Stripeeyes. "You don't have'ta see a cat to swipe at 'em!"

"We've got to try!" Brightstar growled, her voice raising. "It's not going to be a decision—this is an order from your leader; a matter I have taken to StarClan deep within my own thoughts, something I believe we must do for our protection. For the sake of MoonClan!" Everyone grew silent, shocked at Brightstar's sharpness. "While we were out, Icetail and I discovered that MoonClan is being spied on."

Murmurs of shock rippled through the crowd.

"Spied on?" whispered Ashtail to Rainwhisker.

"I bet it was DarkClan!" Goldenpaw growled to Squirreltail. The warrior nodded his head in agreement.

"Who was it?" demanded Skypelt with a hiss.

Brightstar's chin raised. "Goldenpaw's right. It was DarkClan."

Yowls of outrage broke through the Clan. "Those good-for-nothing cowards!" Crowflight spat. "They took a part of our territory. What next, the camp?"

"We should attack them!" declared Hawktalon. Several cats yowled with agreement.

Flameheart exchanged a nervous glance with Icetail, and Silverleaf's eyes grew round with worry.

"Everyone, quiet down!" Icetail yowled, raising his voice over the uproar. "Brightstar's not done talking! Don't you see?" MoonClan began to silence down from Icetail's call, though a few cat's pelts

were still bristling with anger and disbelief.

Brightstar dipped her head. "Thank you, Icetail," she meowed. Icetail gave a curt nod, and settled beside his mate. *I'm angry too, but the Clan has to know how to contain themselves!* he thought with annoyance.

"What are we going to do?" Stonetooth called, his voice clearly worried.

"I have decided that we will not do anything about it," Brightstar finally meowed, sighing. Before any cat could object, she began to talk once more. "If DarkClan figures out that we know about what they are doing, they could pull something worse on us. So as for now, the Clan is going to have to continue on as usual."

"What if they know of our problems?" demanded Sagepelt. Sharpfang gave her a reassuring lick behind her ear.

Brightstar's eyes blazed. "They *won't* know," she finally said. "What I am saying is, we are going to forcefully regain our strength. More hunting patrols, more border patrols, and even more patrols to collect *herbs*. We will show no signs of weakness. No cat will be allowed to even talk of our problems, okay? No kits will say, 'I'm hungry,' no apprentices will fight, no warriors will sleep without contributing to the welfare of the Clan—everybody will be prepared. We *will* make DarkClan scared of us." She turned to Icetail's direction. "I want you to re-assign patrols, and organize a way for the kits and elders to know proper defense moves."

Icetail stared up at his leader and nodded, his heart beating fast. He felt a sense of hope from Brightstar's speech, a feeling of new responsibilities burning within his chest that made him excited.

"MoonClan will no longer be the defense!" she declared. "*We* will be the offense now!"

"MoonClan! MoonClan!" the apprentices began cheering.

In an instant, everyone joined in with eager yowls. "MoonClan! MoonClan!"

As the Clan changed, he felt proud at the unification and organization of his Clanmates. They will be ready for anything! Whatever Dewstar would throw at them, they will anticipate! They will be strong!

However, as the prospect of a battle became more clear within his mind, Icetail started sitting back, watching his Clan as their confidence grew.

This is the complete opposite of what Featherbreeze told me, he thought, worry starting to prick at his heart.

There has to be some other way to accomplish peace that doesn't involve bloodshed and battle!

* * *

The memory of the Clan meeting was fresh in Icetail's thoughts. Just as Brightstar had ordered, he had set up new patrols—but only hunting and battle-training patrols. Border patrols remained twice a day, with the exception of the secret moonhigh patrol. He also arranged for a few warriors to teach the kits defense moves and help the elders to regain the strength they once had.

He felt bad about it, because after all, the elders were finished serving their Clan. But he knew that it had to be done, for a leader's word was law.

Icetail tasted the air, sniffing at his surroundings. *The days are only getting colder and colder,* he thought sadly. *How does Brightstar expect us to be strong, if things are only going to get harder for us?*

He scented fresh mouse-droppings.

He looked around, and spotted a scrawny mouse chewing at a seed under a dead bush. He crouched low to the ground, stalking forward. Accidentally, Icetail stepped onto a stick, and the mouse's head jerked up, spotting him. Icetail bolted from his spot, trying to reach it, but it was no use. The scrawny mouse had already disappeared underneath a burrow, safe from the predators of the outside world.

"Fox-dung!" he spat.

Amberpaw emerged from behind him, carrying a dead shrew. "I've never even seen you loose prey, Icetail," she said, her eyes round.

"My mind is somewhere else, that's all," he muttered.

Ashtail padded up, resting his tail on Icetail's spine. "Don't worry about it, that mouse was scrawny anyway. We should move in closer to the borders. I bet there'll be more prey there."

Amberpaw nodded, burying her shrew quickly. "You're right, Ashtail!" she meowed, padding away. "I'll scout up ahead."

Icetail sighed, and began to smell the air once more. Easily, he found a bird up on the branches of a birch tree. He leaped onto the hard bark, clawing his way up. But as soon as he landed on the branch the bird was on, it noticed him, and quickly flew away.

Disbelief was flowing through Icetail. *Why can't I catch anything?* he thought with frustration. *The loss of prey will cost the Clan!*

Below him on the ground, Ashtail bolted from his spot, and leaped into the air, clawing onto the bird's wings. He took it down, killing it with a blow to the neck. "Got it!" Ashtail called, holding up the bird.

Icetail leaped off the tree, landing gracefully on the forest floor. "I really suck right now," he commented.

"There's clearly something on your head," Ashtail said, burying the bird nearby Amberpaw's shrew. "It might not be something you want to share with me, but just keep this in mind. What is more important? Feeding the Clan, or mere thoughts?"

"I know," he meowed. "Thanks, Ashtail."

His former mentor nodded with a warm smile before he stalked away, trying to scent something elsewhere. Ashtail followed. "Hey, have you seen Amberpaw, by the way?" he asked. "She dissappeared a few moments ago but didn't return."

Icetail turned. "She said she was going to go near the border," he replied. "Wait . . ." Did she really go by the DarkClan borders? His heart stopped with fear. "You don't think that she got caught by a patrol, right?"

"We have to go check," Ashtail growled. "DarkClan is always unpredictable."

Icetail nodded. "You stay here and hunt. I'll look for her."

He ran from his spot, listening to his surroundings. In the distance, he could hear a squirrel hiding out in the hollow of an oak tree. He could also hear a few birds flying high up in the sky, cawing at one another. Icetail stealthily ran from his spot. Once he got near the border, he began to scent around. Where was Amberpaw? He hoped that she hadn't been caught by a DarkClan patrol . . .

But suddenly, he heard hisses and growls. He ran up the border, and in an instant, he could see several DarkClan cats surrounding Amberpaw.

Oh StarClan!

He ran up to them, his eyes wide. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

The cat he most expected to see, Dewstar, turned to his direction. "I haven't seen you since the last gathering, Icetail," he purred.

I saw you in the tunnels, he thought with menace. *You traitor, you liar, you fake!*

"Let Amberpaw go!"

"She crossed our border," growled a DarkClan apprentice. "She deserves to be punished!"

"Hush, Greenpaw," Dewstar ordered. He turned back to Icetail, narrowing his eyes. "But Amberpaw *did* cross the border. She belongs to me now."

Fury boiled deep down inside Icetail. "She is a *MoonClan* apprentice.

Let her go!"

"I'm taking her back to my camp," Dewstar growled. "And tell Brightstar that I will be exchanging her for a price. If MoonClan offers up all their catmint, then I will let Amberpaw go back to you. If not, then I will kill her."

"You can't do that!" Amberpaw gasped, backing up slowly. She bumped into a DarkClan cat and jumped up with fear, before being pinned down by the neck and tail. "Let me go back! Let me go!"

Icetail clawed the ground. There's no way in the name of StarClan that he could beat all of these cats. "Okay. Here's the deal, Dewstar," he finally meowed. "Take me instead, and let Amberpaw go back to MoonClan. She doesn't deserve this; she's an apprentice."

"Too late!" growled a DarkClan warrior. "We've already offered Amberpaw."

"No," Dewstar meowed, putting his tail in front of the warrior's face as a sign to quiet down. "Let's take Icetail instead. He's worth more —he's their *deputy*. Brightstar would much rather get her deputy back than a mere apprentice."

Icetail padded forward. "Now let her go."

The circle of DarkClan cats opened, and Amberpaw slowly crept out, tail bushy and low to the ground and ears pressed back in fear. Every cat laid their eyes on Icetail now, and surrounded him before he could even think of making a run for it.

Dewstar turned to Amberpaw when he made sure Icetail was completely surrounded. "You know what to tell Brightstar," he purred. "Now go quick. I'm giving her five days to decide."

"I won't leave you, Icetail!" Amberpaw wailed.

"Go tell Brightstar!" Icetail demanded. "I can take care of myself!"

Amberpaw studied Icetail for a moment, her gaze sad. "O-okay, Icetail," she managed. She turned away, and began pounding into the MoonClan forest, away from the DarkClan cats. Before she had

disappeared, she turned around and called, "We'll help you, Icetail! Don't worry!"

Dewstar turned to Icetail. "Let's go now, *hostage*."

Icetail gulped, but followed Dewstar anyways. The cats around him were all satisfied. He growled softly, anger radiating off his pelt. *Brightstar, I'll make sure you won't have to give away our medicine supply,* he declared in his thoughts. *So please . . . don't make any sacrifices for me.*

* * *

Once Icetail reached the DarkClan camp, he looked around, his eyes wide. The camp was *huge*! Why hadn't Silverleaf or Squirreltail ever told him how massive everything seemed? It was much bigger and more protected than he had ever expected.

Dens both burrowed into the ground below and towered over him on top of tall rocky slopes in caves. The clearing space itself seemed twice as big as MoonClan's camp. Trees towered around the clearing, blocking out the sun from long-hanging branches and leaves that reflected an unusual pattern of light from the barely-visible sun onto the dirt ground. The most overwhelming part about the entirety of it was the mass amount of cats circling the clearing, speaking in hushed voices by the dens or the fresh-kill pile over. Here, nobody seemed to bury their scraps or share to tongues like the custom in MoonClan. Instead, a few apprentices who looked small enough to be kits fought with snarls and outstretched claws toward the back of the camp, where warriors looked down approvingly; the queens seemed as hungry as the warriors did, making his heart drop with pity although they were the enemy.

Although it was only a little past sunhigh, it seemed like most cats were in camp, if not all. MoonClan was no match for DarkClan's large numbers.

"Keep on walking," growled a DarkClan cat, shoving him forward.

"Watch it!" he snapped to the warrior.

The warrior bared his fangs, but Dewstar padded up, causing the warrior to stop. "Throw him into the prison cave with the others. Make sure to keep watch on him, and do *not* take your eyes off of him. Icetail is an unpredictable cat."

"It's not like I can run away, Dewstar," Icetail growled to his brother.

"Goodbye, Icetail," Dewstar meowed, flicking his tail.

He wanted to leap onto Dewstar and pin him down, and tell him every feeling that he had in his chest and every thought on his head: *We're brothers!* or *I thought you cared about me!* or even *What happened, Dewstar?*

But instead, he miserably followed the warrior as he led him to the prison cave. As Icetail entered, he saw three other cats. One was a DarkClan cat, and two were of CloudClan. He recognized the CloudClan warriors in an instant. One of their names was Windcloud—a white tabby she-cat. The tom was Grassheart, a brown and black tom. He'd met them from past gatherings.

"Icetail!" gasped Grassheart, standing up. "What are you doing here?"

Icetail's eyes were wide. "Me? What about *you*?" he asked.

Windcloud clawed the ground with anger. "Grassheart and I were hunting, and Dewstar captured us," she replied. She glanced up at him. "He's blackmailed CloudClan by saying that the only way for us to go back is by giving them catmint from our herb supply."

Icetail looked down. "Dewstar captured me too," he murmured, "for catmint."

"I think there are sick cats in his Clan. There's no other reason that he would do this unless he were purely evil," growled Grassheart. "But anyways, he gave CloudClan a quarter-moon to give up the catmint for us, and we honestly don't have enough. That quarter-moon is almost up. We have two more days before we are going to get killed."

The memory of Sparrowheart, Icetail's father, being murdered by DarkClan, flashed in his mind. "This is a Clan of murderers," he hissed softly.

The DarkClan warrior turned to them. "Just give up on it already," he muttered. "CloudClan and MoonClan would rather keep their prey than give it for a few cats."

"Why don't you give up your hope that Dewstar will let you return to your regular duties, Mudface?" Grassheart snapped back.

Mudface shrugged and rested back down in his makeshift nest. "Don't bother me."

Icetail's fur bristled. *Why would DarkClan keep their own Clanmates as hostages?* he thought. *Maybe Dewstar isn't a good leader after all.*

He settled in an old nest in the back of the den. Right now, he felt alone even though there were three other cats around him. Ever since he and Silverleaf had become mates, the two slept by one another. Right now, he felt empty without her touch.

Right before he fell asleep, he heard Windcloud murmur, "We're never going to see CloudClan again, aren't we?"

Chapter Forty Seven

IN EDITING

The next morning, Icetail woke up to a rush of cold wind entering through crevices of the den he slept in. He looked around, wondering. *Where am I? Where's Silverleaf?* Then, he remembered what had happened the previous day.

I was captured by Dewstar—I'm in DarkClan.

He glanced at his surroundings. The other cats in the prison den, Mudface, Grassheart and Windcloud, were fast asleep, with the two CloudClan warriors pressing close together for warmth and comfort. Then his eyes landed on the exit of the den, the only spot that offered a bit of dim light in the darkness, and he stood up, not bothering to stretch as he padded up close to take a look outside. The cats of DarkClan assembled together, leaving to their patrols in large groups as if readying for battle.

His fur bristled at the thought of being in the enemy camp.

"Get back in the den," growled the cat who was guarding them. He knew this she-cat to be Lizardpelt whom he'd met before at a gathering. "Based on Dewstar's orders, you are not allow to leave."

Icetail hissed. "I'm not even outside of the den!" he growled in return. "Why don't you go—"

Dewstar was padding up, making Icetail hold back any insult he was about to say. Lizardpelt dipped her head in respect to the Clan leader. "Good morning, Dewstar."

"To you too, Lizardpelt," he said gruffly. "Icetail, come with me. We are going to speak in my den." He narrowed his eyes. "I know you have only so much to tell me."

"I have nothing to say to you," he growled to the DarkClan leader,

easily biting back his lie. Ever since losing Dewstar, endless questions had indeed aroused within his mind. But now that he faced his brother again, eyes watching each other carefully, he the felt anger and betrayal once more.

Lizardpelt bared her fangs. "Don't growl at the Clan leader like that! What disrespect," she scoffed. "Now do as he says!"

"Thank you, Lizardpelt," Dewstar said. "Let's go, Icetail." He turned away, and began walking up to his den. Icetail hesitated, wondering what was happening. But he decided to follow anyways, since he had no other choice. Dewstar was always unpredictable—that was something he and Icetail had in common, so it wasn't safe to be around the DarkClan leader unguarded.

Yet again, righg now I'm in a Clan full of unpredictable and dangerous cats, he thought with unease, the muscles underneath his pelt tensing.

They traveled up a tall slope to the highest point of the camp, where he felt the stares of every cat of DarkClan. Cats muttered insults under their breaths, twitching their whiskers at his capture as they spoke down on MoonClan. Icetail almost slipped on a rock as he climbed the slope and into the leader's den, and his face began burning with embarrassment. When he entered, he saw that this den was surprisingly no bigger than Brightstar's den, except it was harder to see from the lack of light.

Dewstar sat down on his nest, and wrapped his tail around his paws. "Good to see you again, *brother*." The white tom's eyes gleamed with fake pleasure.

Icetail tried to shake off the feeling of exposure from being so deep in DarkClan territory and sucked in a deep breath. He couldn't lose his composure now. "Why did you want to speak with me?"

"Don't be so dry," Dewstar responded, flicking his tail. "I only wanted a hello."

"Then *hello*," Icetail snapped. "Now let me go. I told you; I have *nothing* to say to you, Dewstar." His eyes narrowed. "You betrayed

MoonClan—you betrayed our father!"

"I wasn't the one to kill Sparrowheart, it was my Clanmates," Dewstar pointed out. "Blaming me will only make you angry. Remember that time when Featherbreeze was killed in battle, and you became mean to everyone around you? It's all because you blamed Shadowheart all your life."

Anger bubbled inside Icetail. "Don't bring Featherbreeze or my Clanmates into this!" he yelled. "And for your information, you *watched* your Clanmates kill Sparrowheart with your very eyes! He's our father, and you watched him die without trying to stop it from happening!"

"He only got what he deserved," Dewstar meowed with a shrug.

"He didn't deserve to die," Icetail snarled, unsheathing his claws. "Neither did Softpelt or Vinetail or those other cats from the other Clans you killed."

Dewstar narrowed his own eyes. "You've killed cats too, Icetail. Don't forget that."

Icetail sat back down, knowing that it wouldn't be smart to attack no matter how much he wanted to. "I have, but to defend myself and my Clan," he said, his voice growing lower. "But Dewstar . . . you killed cats for no reason. You told me once that it was a dream that drove you into doing it."

"Exactly. A dream drove me to do it," Dewstar meowed calmly. "I'm sure you had a dream too. But we both have had different dreams. That proved something to me, that our destinies were already shaped out. I want to let you know . . . that MoonClan won't be a Clan for much longer."

Icetail tensed. "What do you mean?"

Dewstar purred. "I remember telling you that I had a dream of leading four Clans. *Four*, not five. And I decided that the fifth Clan that won't be under my rulership will be MoonClan." Dewstar stood up. "I am going to destroy MoonClan. It's too late for them now."

"No, you won't be able to!" Icetail's fur bristled. "I won't let you, Dewstar!"

"I'm already many steps ahead of your Clan!" Dewstar said, standing up. "DarkClan will overrun MoonClan. You won't be able to stop me."

"Then why are you telling me this?" Icetail whispered to Dewstar.

"Because I want you to see things through my perspective," Dewstar said, his dark blue eyes triumphant. "You know, you have DarkClan blood running through your body too. You have the blood of all the previous DarkClan leaders within you."

"That may be so, but I will always be a MoonClan cat!" he spat, beginning to back away.

Dewstar slowly padded forward to him, making him feel closed in. "DarkClan secretly respects you because of your bloodline, Icetail," the leader went on. "You could always join my Clan . . . as my deputy."

"I will never leave MoonClan," Icetail growled softly. "You have no right to question my loyalty like that."

Dewstar shrugged. "Okay, then. Within four days, you will be dead. You know that, right?" Without another word and his heart burning with anger, Icetail bolted out of the leader's den, straight into the clearing. "Get him back to the prisoner's den!" yowled Dewstar to his Clan.

Fear gripped Icetail's chest. *There's nowhere I can run!* he thought. In an instant, a heavy weight was brought to his back, and he collapsed onto the ground. Two cats were pinning him down. One got off of him, growling with rage. It was Toadskip. The other cat, Yellowpaw, gave him a threatening glare.

"Go back to the prison den!" growled Toadskip. "We don't want to see you out here again!"

"Go back, or else," added Yellowpaw with a snarl.

Icetail spat a hiss at the apprentice but went on to the prison den anyways. From the far side of the clearing, he spotted his sister, Lilyclaw, staring at him with worry. He simply fixed his gaze ahead of himself. *She shouldn't worry herself over me. We barely know each other,* he thought sadly.

As he entered the den, Lizardfang shoved him inside. "I knew you shouldn't of gone to talk to Dewstar," she snarled. "Know your place, Icetail!"

"You should know *your* place!" he shot back.

Lizardfang gave a grunt and fixed her post outside the den as guard. Windcloud stared at him with wide eyes. "What happened, Icetail? Did you try to escape?"

"Of course I didn't. I knew I didn't stand a chance in plain daylight," Icetail murmured. "Dewstar said he wanted to speak with me . . . my paws started moving before my head began to think."

"Must've given you a big scare, then," laughed Mudface bitterly.

Icetail sighed and sat down on his nest, observing the small scratch that Yellowpaw had given him on his front paw. He began to lick it. "Dewstar would never scare me," he murmured. "I wasn't thinking, that's all."

Grassheart's eyes dimmed, and he curled up to his nest, pressing his cold nose on his fur.

"What happened with him?" Icetail asked.

Windcloud sighed. "Tomorrow is our execution," she whispered with sadness. "Grassheart is in disbelief. CloudClan never came . . ."

"Don't think like that," Icetail encouraged. "They can still come."

"I know," Windcloud meowed. "I'm keeping my hopes up. But at the same time, I don't want my Clanmates to get hurt."

Icetail understood, turning his gaze to the outside world. The camp was still dark despite the time of day due of to the tree branches

that hung overhead. A figure blocked his view from outside, and his eyes widened when Lilyclaw slowly enter the den.

"Dewstar ordered for me to deliver you all prey," she meowed, dropping down a vole. "I'm sorry, but that's all I can give you."

He nodded. "Thank you."

He waited as Lilyclaw left. Windcloud and Mudface immediately took a few bites from the prey, obviously starved. Grassheart remained in his nest, not in the mood to eat. Icetail decided to let them have the prey. He sighed, and lied down in his own nest.

He was hoping deep down that CloudClan will come to save Windcloud and Grassheart. They did nothing to deserve being imprisoned. Slowly, he fell asleep. Someone was calling him to a dream.

Icetail woke up once more, in a moon-bathed clearing. He looked around, knowing deep down that he was in StarClan. He wondered why he was here. Then, a cat padded out to him, his pelt as bright as the stars. Icetail recognized this cat.

"Sparrowheart!" he gasped.

Sparrowheart purred. "Greetings, my son," he meowed, dipping his head. "You are such a good deputy in my place. I'm glad it was you."

Sadness filtered his heart. "I wish it were you," he murmured, touching noses with Sparrowheart. "Why did you summon me here?"

Sparrowheart looked up. "First, I wanted you to know that I am proud of your decision to stay with MoonClan. I could never have had a better kit," he began. "Secondly . . . I want you to save Grassheart and Windcloud."

"Save them?" Icetail couldn't comprehend fighting with all those DarkClan cats to ensure the two CloudClan warrior's escape. "How?"

"You need to escape DarkClan," Sparrowheart said. "Both MoonClan

and CloudClan have low herb supplies on catmint that can't be spared. It will be best if you could escape, and bring along the other two with you." His gaze saddened. "I don't want to see you or those innocent cats dead."

"What about Mudface?" Icetail asked, instantly remembering the DarkClan warrior.

Sparrowheart's gaze saddened. "There's nothing that we can do about Mudface. His destiny is not with StarClan—he is a DarkClan cat by heart. I don't think he is willing to give that up."

Icetail nodded, and pressed his head against his father's. "I'll miss you, Sparrowheart. Thank you."

His father gave him a lick behind his ear. "Bye, Icetail. Featherbreeze said that she loves you."

Icetail purred. But Sparrowheart and the moon-bathed clearing disappeared before he could reply. He woke back up in his uncomfortable nest in the prison den with a start and looked around, eyes adjusting to what was happening. It was night time.

This may work .

He looked down to Grassheart and Windcloud, and nudged them gently until they woke. Sleepily, Grassheart stood up, while Windcloud's eyes opened.

"What's happening?" murmured Windcloud.

Grassheart yawned.

"We're escaping," Icetail whispered back. "I'm getting you two back to CloudClan."

Windcloud's eyes lit up. "Really?"

"We won't make it," Grassheart said bitterly. "How in StarClan's name are we going to get passed the den guards—yet alone past the camp guards?"

Because StarClan said that we could, he though, knowing it would be wrong to reveal that secret.

"Grassheart is right," Mudface meowed, revealing that he was awake. "There's no way. DarkClan is going to get you all and not only will Grassheart and Windcloud face their trials, but you will as well, Icetail."

Icetail bristled. "Since when were you awake?" he growled. "You won't tell Dewstar, will you?" Fear gripped his heart. Sparrowheart and the rest of StarClan trusted Icetail in escaping with the CloudClan cats.

Mudface shrugged. "I would dig my way out, but ever since that incident moons ago when the prisoners found out that they can do that, thistles have been placed on the other side. You'd be caught before you could get through them."

"I wouldn't want to go there," Icetail murmured. "We'll go another way."

"You can leap onto the branches and climb your way out," Mudface meowed. "Now let me go back to sleep." He curled back in his own nest, covering his eyes with his bushy tail.

I can't believe Mudface just helped us! he thought with surprise. He thought that all DarkClan cats were bad, but he was wrong. After all, Flameheart was always a good cat. He just chose to live his destiny with MoonClan instead of his birth Clan. And he didn't think Lilyclaw was all that bad either.

"Icetail, we don't know how to climb," Windcloud finally meowed. "We were raised on open fields, not in a forest full of trees."

Grassheart nodded in agreement. "And how will we get passed the guard?" he asked.

Icetail snapped his head in their direction. "Stop pointing out the obvious, it's not making anything better," he growled. He sighed, and looked outside the den. "Climbing is easy, by the way. Use your tails for balance, and your claws for grip."

"How about the guard?"

"When Lizardfang is not looking, we're going to make a run for it," Icetail said. Quietly, he crept toward the entrance, and peeked out. His eyes widened. Lizardfang was asleep! *StarClan must be helping us*. He beckoned his tail for the two warriors to come.

They both crept after Icetail, and looked at Lizardfang with astonishment. He crawled out of the den, and once he saw that no cat was in the clearing, he made a run for it. He ran toward the overhanging branches, and leaped for one that looked sturdy enough to hold him. His claws gripped on the soft bark, and he hauled himself up.

He reached down, helping Grassheart up by the scruff, and next, Windcloud. When the two were safe on the branch, he whispered, "Let's get out of here!"

He leaped from one branch to another, the two warriors following close behind. Finally, he landed down on the ground just outside the DarkClan camp. He crept from his spot as soon as he made sure that Grassheart and Windcloud were following close behind him.

That was easier than I thought it would be!

"Let's go to our Clan!" Windcloud declared, running up ahead to scan the area. Icetail followed her, and Grassheart padded behind the two, keeping watch out in the back.

But suddenly, he heard an alarming yowl. The apprentice, Yellowpaw, had spotted them. She must've been a camp guard!

"Run for it!" Icetail yowled, bolting from his spot. "DarkClan is big, follow me so that we don't get lost!"

He remembered the way where the warriors of DarkClan had led him to the camp. He began to run, whipping past trees. Turning around, and saw Windcloud and Grassheart struggling.

"We can't keep up with the trees!" yowled Grassheart. "We aren't use to the forest!"

"Keep close behind me," Icetail called, slowing down for them. He turned fully behind him, and noticed three DarkClan cats chasing after them. "Never mind—no time to slow down!"

He ran faster once more, and could feel both the CloudClan warrior's breath on his flank. As long as they kept close to him, they could use their speed as an advantage and easily whip past the trees without crashing.

The scents back were clear and fresh, and the memory of the route back was becoming clearer in his mind. Since he wasn't lost, he knew that he was getting closer to the MoonClan border.

Icetail quickened his pace and forced himself to keep his head high. He felt weak from the lack of food and poor treatment from the DarkClan cats, and he could tell that Windcloud and Grassheart felt the same way, if not worse, for being there longer than he was. If they were caught, they wouldn't stand a chance!

Finally, he could scent the MoonClan border markers. "We're almost there!" he called over his shoulder. "We can make it!"

He quickened his pace, and so did the other two cats. With long strides, he ran down the path, until finally, he crossed the border to MoonClan. Panting, he turned around to see the DarkClan cats cross over the border with him. In a swift moment, Yellowpaw leaped at him, but he dodged her easily.

Windcloud was being tackled by Lizardpelt, and Grassheart was pinned down by Toadskip. Icetail turned back to his opponent, Yellowpaw, who lunged herself at him once more, spitting with rage. *She's just an apprentice*! he thought, knocking her down to the ground with a kick. He nipped her ear and gave her a blow to her side, which made her yowl with pain.

"Get out of here!" Icetail snarled, "or I'll give you scars you'll never forget!"

With fear, Yellowpaw raced across the border and back onto her own territory. Without thinking, Icetail ran to Grassheart's aid, forcing Toadskip to fall off of him.

"Thanks!" Grassheart rasped, and he leaped to his paws.

Side by side, Icetail and Grassheart drove Toadskip across the border, each smoothly landing blows on the DarkClan tom. He turned to Windcloud, who had just sent Lizardfang running off.

"We did it!" gasped Icetail. "I never thought I'd make it back to MoonClan!"

"I've missed being out in the open," agreed Windcloud with a nod. "We have to go back to CloudClan at once!"

"Wait!" Grassheart yowled. "More cats are coming!" He angled his ears toward the forest, and three more cats ran out. "We'll never make it back!"

"We can drive them off," Icetail encouraged. He leaped at the first cat in reach, but he was knocked out of the air by another DarkClan cat. A she-cat bit down at his torn ear, making Icetail yowl with pain. The other cat, Greenpaw, was forcing him to the ground while the she-cat landed blows to his pelt.

He felt like his fur was being ripped off. He struggled to fight away the stings, but could do no more than fight to keep the two cats off his neck with all his strength.

Windcloud fought off a DarkClan tom while Grassheart was laying on the ground, clearly injured. He struggled harder against the two cats who were pinning him down. *I have to help Grassheart*! he thought with worry.

"Say hello to those StarClan fools for me," growled the she-cat. She was about to land the death blow on Icetail's neck with outstretched claws, but instantly, she and the apprentice were flung off of him. His eyes widened. Three MoonClan cats ran out of the bushes. Icetail immediately noticed Brightstar, Silverleaf and Redsky.

Silverleaf was fighting off Greenpaw, growling with rage. "Get off our territory, you mouse-hearts!"

He looked at her, admiring her courage before staggering up and onto his paws. His legs wobbled from the blows he received and his

pelt stung as if he were on fire. Turning, he saw Redsky helping Grassheart back onto his paws, and Brightstar pinned down the she-cat who had Icetail trapped. "Don't mess with my deputy, you scum," she snarled.

"Then his little apprentice should watch where she puts her paws!" retorted the DarkClan cat. Instantly, Brightstar and the warrior clashed, gripping each other around the neck as they raked each other's bellies with their back claws.

Silverleaf chased Greenpaw over the border, a long but faint scratch on her right flank. As soon as she made sure the apprentice had gone, she raced toward Icetail, worry in her eyes. "You reckless idiot!" she gasped, licking the wound on his pelt. "Your always getting yourself into these kinds of messes!"

Icetail steadied himself on his paws. "I have to look out for my Clan," he responded weakly. "We have to help Beightstar . . ."

"No, you lost all your energy," Silverleaf meowed.

"But she's on her last life!" Icetail insisted, glancing toward Brightstar's direction. The two warriors were still fighting. Blood and fur flew everywhere. He couldn't tell who was winning.

Silverleaf studied them for a second, and nodded. "Wait by Redsky and the CloudClan warriors. I'll help Brightstar." She dashed from her spot before Icetail could protest, leaping back into battle. The DarkClan cat was biting down hard on Brightstar's neck. Icetail's heart almost leaped with fear. *Let her go! You'll kill her!* he thought with dread.

But before anything, Silverleaf landed on the warrior, knocking her off of Brightstar. The MoonClan leader gasped and sputtered, taking a deep breath as Silverleaf engaged in battle.

"I'm coming!" Icetail meowed, running up to the MoonClan leader. He let her lean on his shoulder. "We have to go soon. More warriors are going to come!"

Brightstar weakly turned to Silverleaf. "Help her . . ." she rasped.

"That warrior is *tough*."

Icetail nodded, and let Brightstar lean on Windcloud. The CloudClan warrior had already had driven away the cat she was fighting against, but she was left with two scratches on her muzzle.

Icetail forced himself to steady on his paws before leaping by Silverleaf's side in battle, allowing energy to flow through his blood as he growled angrily to the DarkClan she-cat.

"So you're back on your paws," the enemy laughed.

Both Silverleaf and Icetail tackled the her simultaneously. Silverleaf bit down on her ear, hard enough to cause a tear, while Icetail scratched her hindlegs with fully outstretched claws. The two of them fought the cat in unison until the DarkClan cat was visibly weakened.

She struggled under Icetail, breaking free and running across the border. Panting, Icetail turned to his mate. "We did it!" he exclaimed.

She nodded. "Fighting with you was like fighting with ai—you work perfectly with my moves," she purred.

Redsky ran up to them. "This is no time to be talking," said the she-cat. "More DarkClan cats are going to come soon. We have to get back to camp!"

"They *really* want to kill us!" Icetail growled to himself with frustration. "Let's go, Redsky."

Brightstar weakly turned to Icetail's direction. "Y-you are a good deputy, Icetail," she murmured.

"Save your strength, Brightstar," Icetail advised. "You need it for MoonClan."

He began to lead the cats back to camp, keeping at a steady pace. Brightstar and Grassheart were injured deeply, and he didn't want to pressure them.

We have to get them to camp, fast! he thought. *Those wounds could kill a cat*!

* * *

Once Icetail got to the MoonClan camp, he rushed the Clan leader and Grassheart to the medicine den with the help of Silverleaf, Windcloud and Redsky. Sweetheart looked at him, surprise and worry in her eyes. "You're back!"

"I am," Icetail meowed with a nod. "Can you please see to them? They got very injured in a fight between DarkClan."

Sweetheart set them down. "You all need to get your scratches checked later. I have to see to Grassheart and Brightstar first," she murmured.

Icetail dipped his head and left the den. He was immediately met by a crowd of cats. Amberpaw was the first to greet him. "Icetail!" she cried. "I thought you'd of died because of me!" She buried her face in his fur. "I'm so sorry!"

"It's not your fault," he reassured his apprentice, giving her a lick behind her ear. "I only stayed there for a night. It was not too bad."

"Not too bad? You were in *DarkClan* territory!" she protested.

Squirreltail padded up. "Who are the CloudClan cats? Why are they here?" he asked.

"CloudClan is raiding MoonClan!" Shadekit cried. "MoonClan, attack!" He leaped onto Berrykit.

Berrykit clawed at Shadekit. "Never, you Clan of weaklings!" the kit squeaked back.

Sagepelt growled of disapproval. "Both of you, get back to the nursery! This is warrior business," she scolded her kits, herding them away.

Icetail turned to Squirreltail and the rest of the Clan. Now that the kits were gone, he was able to tell the story. "I escaped with them.

All three of us were under the same situation, so I knew that we all had to get out of it." His eyes dimmed. "And DarkClan planned to kill them tomorrow . . ."

"We're glad your back, Icetail," purred Dropeyes. "I thought I'd never see you again." She touched his nose to his, and he returned the favor.

Before any of his Clanmates could say anything else, Sweetheart immediately ran from her den and to Icetail's side. "Icetail! It's urgent!"

Icetail whipped his head in her direction. "What is it?" he demanded.

Grief welled into her eyes. "I-it's Brightstar!" the medicine cat wailed. "She told me to tell you to lead well . . . a-and then she stopped breathing."

Icetail's eyes widened. "You don't mean that she . . ."

Sweetheart buried her face in his pelt. "She's dead, Icetail! Brightstar is dead! I couldn't save her—the wounds on her neck were too deep!"

Silence consumed the camp.

Brightstar was . . . *dead*?!

Chapter Forty Eight

Edited ✔

Dawn was coming soon. He could feel it by how the air was getting warmer and the sky was beginning to lighten. He crawled out of the nursery, shaking his ruffled fur against the light wind. Looking up to the sky, he noticed the peeking slightly over the tree-tips that circled the camp. The blush of red against the dark sky was breath-taking.

Against the outline, he spotted Brightstar sitting on top of her den, looking out at the sunrise. He stared at her with awe—her beautiful white pelt was bright against the orange-blue colors in the background, and he could easily see her eyes glimmer. Icekit padded up to the base of the rock and looked up, admiring the beauty of his leader.

Brightstar's head turned to his direction, her warm gaze filling his heart. "You're the first cat awake, Icekit," she purred. "A warrior already, I see."

Icekit stared up at her, his eyes lighting up with admiration for the leader. "Good morning, Brightstar!" he called. "The dawn must be so pretty from where you are." He paused. "It is, right?"

"I don't know," his leader replied. "Come up and see so for yourself."

Nervously, Icekit put a paw on the Moonrock, and then hauled himself upward. Rock by rock, he leaped, until he was right beside Brightstar. He stared at the dawn, and his eyes widened. "It is more beautiful!" he gasped. "It must be amazing being leader, to see something like this every day."

"You can be leader one day, Icekit," Brightstar meowed, returning her eyes to the dawn.

Icekit's head tilted. "But I thought Sparrowheart was the deputy? He's next, right?" Hope filled into his heart. Sparrowheart was his father, and he had always dreamt of having his father as Clan leader one day.

"You can be leader after him," Brightstar purred. "Only cats who work for this position will get it. Cats who have the ambition for leadership, or a heart that will never abandon his Clanmates always become leader."

"I thought every cat was like that," murmured Icekit.

Brightstar nodded. "Most cats are. Clanmates are suppose to look after each other, after all. But the cats who truly deserve such a position are usually the ones who earn it." She looked down to him. "You most definetly look after your denmates, and I am proud of that."

"Really?" he asked with excitement.

"Really," Brightstar replied, letting her nose rest on his head. "And maybe one day, you'll get to watch the dawn rise from the Moonrock like I do as the Clan leader."

"That will be amazing!" Icekit meowed, looking back out to the dawn. "Maybe one day I can be as good a leader as you!"

* * *

Icetail stared with horror into the depths of Sweetheart's eyes. "She's . . ." He could barely manage out the word. *Brightstar is dead.* Pain clawed at his heart. "You're joking, right? This is such a cruel joke, Sweetheart . . ."

Sweetheart shook her head. "I am not joking," she whispered. "She died in the medicine den moments ago." She looked down to her paws, her gaze clouding with grief.

The Clan was dead silent. Icetail couldn't turn his head to face them. He couldn't save Brightstar after all. He thought that everything would be okay . . . he thought that he'd escape DarkClan with the other two warriors, and make it back to the Clan, only to be greeted by his leader and friends. But that didn't happen, for the death of his leader slipped right under his nose.

I should of noticed! If I had, then I would of helped her fight sooner! It's all my fault! Icetail collapsed on the ground. "She can't be dead!" he yowled.

Silverleaf quietly padded up, and pressed head against his. "We will all grieve with you," she murmured, her voice as quiet as a butterfly flapping its wings.

Shadowheart emerged to the front of the crowd of cats. "Doesn't that mean he will be Clan leader now?"

Icetail froze, realizing what Shadowheart had just said. That's true, he *would* have to be Clan leader. *But I can't do this without Brightstar*! he thought, remembering all his times with her. MoonClan had always been so secure under her knowledge and leadership. He felt like he wouldn't be able to do half of what she does.

"When's he going to go to the Night Flower?" Amberpaw asked Silverleaf.

"Shh," Silverleaf scolded.

After a moment of silence, he looked up and to the medicine where her limp body lay. "Bring her body out here," he said, his voice cracking with grief. "Prepare her for burial. We have to let her have her proper burial."

Sweetheart shook her head. "You may see her, but we will have to leave soon."

"Why?"

"You must get your nine lives, Icetail, and become MoonClan's leader. No matter how much we wish it never happened, Brightstar's final life is gone and she is with StarClan now." Sweetheart paused. "We must leave tonight, and carry out the vigil for tomorrow."

He took a deep breath. Brightstar would want him to lead the Clan through this, to remain strong even through these difficult times.

"I understand," he murmured, slowly turning his gaze to his Clanmates. His heart almost broke as he met the glimmering eyes of his many friends, who looked to him at what to do. Brightstar's closest friends seemed the most troubled. "I am going to the Night Flower to receive my nine lives from StarClan. Ashtail will watch

the Clan while I am gone, and tomorrow we will carry out Brightstar's vigil." He paused, flicking his tail to the CloudClan warriors. "They will be resting here temporarily. We helped each other escape DarkClan's wrath. They fought bravely with us during Brightstar's last moments . . ."

Some cats turned to the CloudClan warriors, acknowledging their presence.

Silverleaf's eyes widened. "You're really going?" she asked. "What if DarkClan attacks the camp?"

He shook his head. "I doubt they will. If I still know Dewstar, he will want me to recover." He remembered the challenge Dewstar said to his face. *He wants me to fight this battle of Clans with him*, he thought. *But unlike the old leader, Sandstar, he wants to play this fairly*.

Sweetheart beckoned him forward with her tail. "Come and receive your traveling medicine. We won't be able to hunt during the whole journey, and if we eat, we will become off-course." She looked up. "There's still enough time, too. Moonhigh is approaching."

He nodded weakly. "We will leave now, then."

* * *

Icetail had never seen the Night Flower in his whole entire life. He would always hear stories about it, and how it illuminated brilliantly against the moonlight to take a cat's soul to StarClan. Now, he was looking nervously inside the tunnel that lead to the cave of the Night Flower. *Such a narrow tunnel* . . . His paws trembled.

Sweetheart turned to him, narrowing her eyes. "What's wrong?" she said. "Are you regretting accepting this?"

Icetail shook his head. "No, that's not it. It's just that . . . I'm not too fond of small spaces." This was the first time either Sweetheart or Icetail spoke during the entire trip. Both cats were too filled with sorrow to speak. "I don't know if I can accept such confined spaces."

"We have to go down now," encouraged Sweetheart. "When the moon goes away, you won't be able to get your nine lives. We must be quick."

He nodded. "Alright. Lead the way, and fast."

Sweetheart pushed her way into the tunnel, and Icetail followed with discomfort. Nervously, he followed the medicine cat down the tunnels. His whiskers guided him, feeling the walls all around him.

Once it got completely dark, Icetail's fur began to bristle with unease. Scents of heather and water washed down the tunnel, the stagnant air uncomfortable in his nose. He wanted to ask Sweetheart how much farther they would travel, but he decided not to—it'd be a waste of breath that he felt he was losing.

"Almost there," Sweetheart murmured, "just a little farther down."

A sharp scent reached his nose. "Is this . . . the scent of the Night Flower?" he asked with surprise. It was sweet and sour, tangy on his tongue yet strong, as if there were a patch of them. He couldn't believe this smell could emit from a single flower.

Sweetheart nodded. In just a moment, he began to see a faint light. Finally, the two of them reached their destination. Icetail stared with awe at the clearing in the cave. The sky was completely visible despite being underground. The Night Flower, on the other paw, was huge, towering over Icetail. Small insects swarmed within it, sucking in its tasteful nectar.

"When moonlight hits, the flower will illuminate," Sweetheart whispered to him. "That's when you will breathe in the scent of the flower and drink its nectar. Your connection with StarClan will thus begin."

He nodded, and waited.

At last, the dark clouds in the sky revealed the moon, and beams of white light filtered into the cave. The flower illuminated brightly, and his eyes widened. It was beyond beautiful—beyond anything he had ever imagined.

"It's time." Sweetheart's mew was so soft, it was barely a whisper. Icetail simply nodded, too uneasy to speak.

He padded forward, and reached into one of the large petals, taking in it's sweet nectar. Then, with the scent of the flower deep in his lungs, he curled up by the thick and strong stem, his eyes growing heavy with sleep. In a moment's time, he fell asleep. Everything around him was dark and he could not see anything. Panic filled his heart.

Is StarClan rejecting me? he thought frantically, looking around.

But in just a moment, the darkness faded away, and he found himself underneath the moon, the warmth of StarClan all around him. Relief filled his body—his ancestors hadn't rejected him after all.

He could make out some cat walking up to him. Brightstar came into view, her pelt starry and her eyes warm. "Hi, Icetail," she purred, touching noses with him.

"It's good to see you again," he whispered, trembling with longing. It felt like he'd only seen her moments ago in the battle against DarkClan, fighting so brilliantly to save her deputy's life.

She purred. "I am sorry to have left you so suddenly. MoonClan will be thrilled to be under your leadership. Are you ready to ready to receive your nine lives?"

He hesitated, and then nodded. "Yes, I am."

Brightstar thus touched her nose to Icetail's head. "With this life, I give you love," she began. "My heart has always loved you, Icetail, so I want you to use this gift and love your Clanmates—especially Silverleaf—as if they were your kits. Raising you was as if I were raising my own son, training you was one of the best adventures I've come to know in my lifetime. Continue loving your Clan with every being of your soul."

Icetail was surprised for a moment. *I would have never guessed Brightstar thought this much of me*.

But in a quick moment, pain overflowed him, and he gasped. A bolt of agony swept through Icetail and he shut his eyes, trying to endure the pain. Then, it was all over, and he could feel all the love Brightstar had for him in his own heart—a warmth so filling and so strong that it gave him new strength.

She dipped her head and backed away to let the next cat approach.

Next, came Featherbreeze. "Hello, my son," his mother murmured. She touched her nose to his head, just as Brightstar had.

"Featherbreeze! I've missed you so much," he gasped.

"With this life, I give you nobility," she said, her voice strong. "You are a noble cat, strong at heart and knows what is right. I am proud of you for that."

Another bolt of pain flashed through Icetail. He yowled, experiencing the same unbearable pain he had with Brightstar, and then, events of Featherbreeze's life through her eyes flashed through his head. *I . . . I can see myself!* he thought, his mind filled with images of her memories.

"You've been watching me all this time," he purred weakly, recovering from the pain.

"Always, Icetail. I must go now," she meowed, dipping her head. "Use your life wisely." She stepped backward, taking her place right beside Brightstar.

Next, a cat Icetail didn't recognize walked out of the shadows. "I am Grasspelt," she greeted. Her green eyes were old with experience. "I am sure you've met my son, Grassheart of CloudClan."

"He's your son?" Icetail asked with surprise.

"Yes. Although I am from MarshClan, not all cats have the heart to follow the warrior code so diligently," she went on. "You were but an apprentice when I have died. But I am thankful for you saving my son, even though he is of another Clan. Because of you, he and WindCloud can have their kits peacefully."

"Kits!" he exclaimed. "That's wonderful!"

Grasspelt nodded, her tail flicking pleasantly. "I am here to give you your third life," she said, touching her nose to his head. "With this life, I give you wisdom to know what is right, even if it means to go beyond Clan boundaries."

Pain flashed through Icetail, and he cringed, holding back a yowl this time. He felt the life enter through his body, coursing within his blood as if strengthening him. But as this life entered his very essence, he smelled something very familiar . . . the moor! *Even though Grasspelt had been a MarshClan cat, she always loved the moors,* he recognized. *She was a hero to all the Clans! I see her memories!*

Grasspelt dipped her head and stepped backward.

Next, Shard padded into the clearing. "Greetings Icetail," meowed the old Twilight Forest tom.

"You're giving me a life?" he exclaimed. "I thought that the cats of the Twilight Forest were bad!"

Amusement filtered through his eyes. "Not all of us are considered evil, we just decided that the rules of StarClan would never apply to us." He touched his nose to Icetail's head. "With this life, I give you justice," Shard meowed. "We are all equal. No cat is different. You are a beautiful example of that."

Another bolt of pain flashed through him as his fourth life entered his body. Icetail felt strange as he received this life, but he shook away the inexplainable feelings as he watched Shard disperse among the other three cats once he was finished.

Next came Vinetail. His eyes widened. Many moons ago, Vinetail had been murdered by Dewstar, and ever since that day, he had never seen the medicine cat, not even in a dream.

Vinetail purred and touched his nose to Icetail's head. "Once, I thought you'd of been cut off for a medicine cat," he admitted. "It was that day you went herb collecting with me. But after that, I

realized that your destiny was always shaped out to do something different. Perhaps something even greater."

"Sweetheart has missed you," Icetail told him. "*She* was the true choice of being the next medicine cat. Never me."

Vinetail nodded, and went on with the ceremony. "With this fifth life, I give you sight," said the old medicine cat. "No longer you will be blind of what is around you."

Again, he felt the pain of his fifth life consuming his body. Vinetail padded to the other four cats, taking his place with them just as the next cat emerged into the clearing.

"Ripplefur!" Icetail gasped, staring with amazement at Silverleaf's mother. "I have missed you dearly. Your kits grew up to be wonderful warriors!"

Ripplefur purred in response. "Thank you for watching over Squirreltail, and especially Silverleaf," said the young queen. "Even though I can't see them, tell them how much I miss them. Also, tell them that Spottedkit is well."

"I will," he promised, remembering the young kit who had lost her life to greencough along with her mother.

Pleased, Ripplefur touched her nose to his head. "With your sixth life, I give you the ability to protect. Continue on protecting the Clan, as more warriors come and go. And please continue to protect Silverleaf in my place."

The pain went on once more, but he controlled it this time, already used to it. When it was over, Ripplefur padded away to the other cats to sit among them. This time, a cat who Icetail didn't recognize approached. She was a white she-cat with black tabby marks and eyes as pale as the moon.

"I am Whiteeye, the deputy of MoonClan before your father," she explained. "I am here to give you your seventh life." Touching her nose to his head, she meowed, "with this life, I give you the ability to lead. Be wise for your friends and Clanmates, Icetail. Always

choose the decision that you think is best as leader of your Clan."

The pain sparked through him quickly, and he held his posture, enduring the heavy feelings that tried to weigh him down. *I promise to be a great leader!* he thought. Whiteeye left and joined the other cats just as the next StarClan cat came by. He recognized his father, Sparrowheart, instantly.

"Greetings," he meowed, touching his nose to his head.

"It's good to see you again," Icetail agreed, happy to be by his father's side once more. "I promise I will be as good as a leader you could ever have been."

"That's good to hear," Sparrowheart purred. "With this life, I give you the strength of a lion. Lions don't only use their strength to kill, Icetail. You must know that, and help those who are blind of this fact to realize it."

The life surged through him as Sparrowheart joined the rest of the dead cats. Finally, his last life emerged, padding slowly from the shadows. It was a black she-cat with blue eyes.

"Who are you?" Icetail asked, realizing that this cat was not someone he had ever seen or heard of.

The cat looked up. "My name is Darkstar," she meowed. "I was the founder and creator of DarkClan many seasons ago." Her gaze saddened. "It is something I wish I had never done."

"*You're* DarkClan's first leader?" he asked with surprise.

She nodded. "I am. And you and all of the previous DarkClan leaders are of my kin. I have decided to give you your final life as redemption for the rogue Clan that I had brought up from the shadows." She touched her nose to his head. "With this life, I give you light. Use it well to light up your way even through the darkest moments."

The pain of his final life almost threw him off his paws. He gasped from the feeling—it was as if his blood was boiling and his pelt was covered in thorns; as if he were being crushed by a tree from the

pressure he felt in his head, on his heart, an overwhelming feeling that was worse than the other eight lives that had become a part of him. His paws started to tremble as he felt the life settle down within his soul, becoming one and whole with him. The feeling slowly started to fade, and he inhaled in the sweet air of StarClan as the heavy feeling released.

"Thank you, Darkstar," he breathed as she joined his other life-givers.

Brightstar stepped up. "I hail you by your new name, Icestar. Your old life is no more. You have now received the nine lives of a leader, and StarClan grants you guardianship of MoonClan. Defend it well; care for young and old; honor your ancestors and the traditions of the warrior code; live each life with pride and dignity."

"Icestar! Icestar!" the cats who gave him lives chanted. Brightstar, Featherbreeze, Grasspelt, Shard, Vinetail, Ripplefur, Whiteeye, Sparrowheart, and Darkstar all raised their voices together in chorus as they chanted the MoonClan leader's new name, pride, joy and the sweet sense of reunion lingering in their voices.

He stood taller as they chanted, and he felt the responsibility of having such a new name course deep within his chest. *Brightstar, you were right,* he thought, turning to the leader. *I don't have a clue how you always knew I'd be leader, but I am happy that I was your deputy.*

Chapter Forty Nine

Edited ✔

Hi guys! Icetail's Enemy is almost finished, but don't worry, there'll be a book two because I love writing this :) help this book get to 1K votes, please! Thanks guys! :D and sorry for not updating in like a week... Honestly, I had writers block >_<

Icestar entered the camp, Sweetheart at his heels. Since he had only woken up from the nine lives ceremony barely before dawn, the sun was almost fully over the trees, lighting the camp with colors of a new beginning.

Don't forget . . . I can't tell anyone what happened in my dream, he thought, recalling the instructions he received from the cats of StarClan just before he had left their hunting grounds. The leader's naming was a private and dignified ceremony that ought to be kept between him and the other cats who named him.

In camp, most of the warriors were around Brightstar's corpse, paying their respects to her dead body. His heart sunk, as it was different seeing her like this than up in StarClan, where she was young and happy.

Sweetheart padded ahead of him, announcing their arrival to the Clan. "We've returned!"

Immediately, everyone looked up. Interest sparked in Flameheart's eyes as Shadowheart, Silverleaf, and a few others murmured their greetings, curious as to what happened. Everyone else was silent. Icestar knew he had to announce his leadership now, and choose his new deputy.

Carefully, he slipped past every cat, and climbed up the Moonrock, still a little weak and hungry and cold from his journey. Over the distance on top of the leader's rock, he could see the sun more than half over the tree horizon. *It's so beautiful,* he thought, recalling

memories of his kithood where he spent dawns upon the leader's rock with Brightstar.

The grief of his leader surged through him, but he forced it to go away, since he knew that she was well in StarClan. He looked down to his own Clan. "Sweetheart and I have returned from our journey to the Night Flower," he began. "I'm happy to return here safely with my nine lives and as the leader of MoonClan, now known as Icestar."

The silence broke when MoonClan began to cheer. "Icestar! Icestar!"

He felt proud to listen to his new name coming from the friends he grew up with.

"In accordance to the warrior code, I am also going to appoint my new deputy." Every cat silenced completely, their ears pricked up to the Moonrock with curiosity. "I say this before StarClan so that they may approve of my choice. Ashtail will be my deputy. There's no cat I can trust more." He looked down to his former mentor, and smiled softly.

Everyone began to chant his name. "Ashtail! Ashtail!"

"This meeting is dismissed," he said, leaping off the rock. His Clanmates immediately greeted him warmly, crowding him to welcome him as their new leader.

Silverleaf gave him a lick behind his ear. "Welcome back, Icestar," she purred. "It's been quiet without you here."

"Well, it's great to be home," he told her.

"Congratulations on receiving your leader's name," Flameheart added, giving him a friendly nudge.

Rainwhisker flicked Icestar's ear with his tail playfully. "Good to have you back, Icestar!" meowed his old friend.

Stripeeyes and Adderclaw both padded up to him side by side from Brightstar's body. "When'll we bury her?" Adderclaw asked, angling his ears toward the or previous leader's direction. "Her body's

almost fully cold. Us elders have been keeping her warm all night."

Stripeeyes nodded with agreement. "If she stays out of the ground any longer, she'll start to smell and attract bugs to the camp," he added. "We want to bury her before she starts to change. We want to remember her always as our strong and dignified leader."

"We'll bury her as soon as possible, so that she'll be warm under the sun," Icestar responded softly. "But first, let me pay my own respects towards her."

Slowly, he walked towards Brightstar's body, memories of her flooding through his mind that filled his heart with warmth. He lay right next to her, pressing his nose to her cold fur. "You've been such a good leader to me," he whispered, closing his eyes. "I wish you good hunting in StarClan, and that you'll find peace among the stars."

"Well said," said Mousetail in his ear, setting a comforting tail over his shoulders.

Icestar remained by her body for several more moments, taking in her faint scent and fading warmth. He felt the love she gave him in his ceremony surge through his chest once more.

"We've got to bury her," Thrushclaw said sympathetically. "It won't be good for everyone if we were to keep her here any longer."

"That's fine," Icestar murmured. "You and the other elders may take her to a grave. Bring Skypelt and Sweetheart with you. She'll know what to do since she's the medicine cat, and it's good to have the company of a warrior."

Thrushclaw nodded, and the four elders crowded around her body.

Knowing that Brightstar was in good paws now, he left her and walked over to Silverleaf, who was talking to Shiningmoon. The orange she-cat turned to him, and dipped her head with respect. "Congratulations on being leader," she murmured.

"Thank you," Icestar replied. "Is it okay if I borrow Silverleaf?"

Shiningmoon turned to the silver warrior. "Should I go?" she asked politely.

"Sure. Thanks." Silverleaf nodded. "I have to talk to Icestar now."

Shiningmoon dipped her head to Icestar once more, and walked away toward Squirreltail and Goldsun, who were sitting a little too close and grooming one another. *Did Squirreltail and Goldsun become mates?* he wondered. He decided to ask about it later, and turned to Silverleaf. "Let's go for a walk," he suggested.

"What about the rule of only three cats being out of camp?" she asked.

"That was Brightstar's rule. I'm the leader now," he reminded her gently. "Do you want to go on a walk with me?"

She purred. "I do."

"Let's go then, but let me have a quick word with Ashtail first," he said. "Wait for me by the entrance." He dashed away from her and ran to his deputy.

Ashtail dipped his head to Icestar immediately. "Thank you for choosing me as your deputy. It's good to know that you have my trust," he meowed, warmth behind his voice.

Icestar touched his tail to his shoulder. "Of course I'd trust you," he purred. "Half of my apprenticeship, you were my mentor before you got into your injury. You were the best mentor I ever had."

"I'm sure I wasn't as good as Brightstar," Ashtail retorted.

"Sometimes I wished I had you back," he said humorously. "Anyways, I just had to remind you about the border patrols that have to be set. The elders are going to bury Brightstar already with the assistance of Sweetheart and Skypelt, and I need Amberpaw to be put on her apprentice duties."

Ashtail nodded. "I'll do it. I can also send out hunting patrols," he suggested.

"That's good. If you need me, I'll be out with Silverleaf," he announced. "See you soon." He turned away, and padded back to Silverleaf. He was positive that Ashtail knew what he was doing, so he felt no discomfort at all in leaving the camp so soon.

He returned by his mate's side once more, ready to leave the camp. Side by side, they left, padding past Fireshade and Nightrose, who were both guarding the camp entrance. Both of them meowed their greeting before going back to their duties.

Together, both Icestar and Silverleaf padded through MoonClan's forest, enjoying the sun warming their pelts against the cold air.

"How is it being leader?" Silverleaf asked quietly.

He sighed. "I feel nervous about it since I only had just gotten back from the Night Flower. But I think things can turn out right."

"Do you think that . . . it'll change anything between us?" she asked more quietly.

He shook his head. "Never. You're more important to me than anything," he responded, pressing his pelt close to her. "And . . . Ripplefur visited me. She told me that she's watching over you and your brother. Spottedkit is doing well with her."

"Really?" whispered Silverleaf. "I haven't seen her since I was a little kit. It's hard remembering her clearly, but I do miss her."

"She was a great cat," he murmured.

"I bet she was." She looked up to him. "It's great knowing that our ancestors are by our side, isn't it?"

He sat down, deciding to take a rest. "It is." Silverleaf sat beside him and rest her head on his shoulder. "I wonder if peace like this could ever last."

"It could," she sighed, "As long as there's darkness, though, we'll *never* find peace."

Icestar knew that really, she was talking about the prophecy.

* * *

Icestar spent most of his first day as leader outside the camp with Silverleaf, talking with her and hunting as a pair, before returning to camp later to spend the afternoon resting. By dusk, he was out in the forest again, leading the last hunting patrol of the day with Sharpfang, Amberpaw, and Rainwhisker.

He was at the heart of the territory, away from all the borders for once. Quietly, he stalked a vole, low to the ground and silent. Gracefully, he leaped from his spot, landing right onto his prey, killing it swiftly before it had a chance to squeal. The worst part of hunting was hearing the animal's poor cries, so he was grateful that he had killed it swift enough.

"That was a cool catch!" exclaimed Amberpaw. "How do you leap so . . . *quietly*?"

"What do you mean?" Icestar asked, dropping his catch on the ground.

Amberpaw padded up. "You barely made a sound while you pushed off the ground. Blackpaw is usually loud and Goldenpaw always steps on twigs or something. I mean, I'm no better than them, either."

He shrugged, knowing it wasn't something he necessarily learned. "Ashtail used to do it, so I guess I've caught on with him," he meowed. "Why don't you try? It's easy—bundle up your haunches, keep your upper body lower to the ground, and be aware of your surroundings, especially things under your paws."

"So the prey won't hear us, right?" Amberpaw asked.

"Exactly," Icestar said. "First crouch like me." He demonstrated his position to her.

Once Amberpaw copied him almost perfectly, she hissed with frustration. "My forelegs hurt!"

Icestar nodded. "You'd normally feel pain at first. I'm used to it . . . Well, you're probably stiff."

She got up, and tilted her head. "Should I go for a run?" she asked.

He was about to say yes, until he realized something. *I shouldn't let her stray far,* he thought. *DarkClan can be anywhere, even if this is my territory.* "No, it's okay. We should go rest. Today, we're bringing Windcloud and Grassheart home."

"I'm going?" she exclaimed, suddenly excited.

He flicked his tail as he began to walk away with the vole in his jaws. "Sure, if you behave, Amberpaw."

"Sorry," she mewed.

"That's better."

He began to lead them through the forest, spotting Rainwhisker hunting up in the trees, and Sharpfang waiting paitently with a squirrel and a mouse in his jaws. Icestar looked up to Rainwhisker, watching as he stalked a thrush on top of the branches.

Swiftly, Rainwhisker leaped at the thrush, and caught its wing, causing the bird to screech with pain. Rainwhisker snapped it's neck, and leaped down the tree, landing delicately on the earth.

"Great catch!" Amberpaw gasped, clearly amazed.

Rainwhisker nodded to her. "Thank you."

"We're going back to camp now," Icestar said to Rainwhisker and Sharpfang. "It's time to take the CloudClan warriors home."

"Alright, Icestar," Sharpfang mewed, his voice muffled from the prey he was carrying.

He began to lead his patrol back to the camp, listening to the conversation between Rainwhisker and Amberpaw.

"What you did in the trees was awesome!" meowed the apprentice eagerly. "I wanna learn how to hunt in the trees. That would be *so* cool!"

"Every apprentice learns to do so at some point," Rainwhisker said. "I'm sure Icestar is teaching you."

Icestar nodded. "I am. But first I'm trying to teach her how to *climb*. She can't hunt all the way up there if she doesn't know her way up and down." He flicked his tail with amusement.

"I know how to climb!" Amberpaw snapped.

"Alright, alright," Icestar purred.

"Icestar," Sharpfang meowed, padding up beside him. "Could we talk?"

He nodded, knowing that it was best to listen to what his Clanmates had to say. *A bad leader would never listen to his Clanmates,* Icestar thought. "What would you like to talk about?"

Sharpfang's gaze hardened on Icestar's amber eyes. "DarkClan."

The fur on Icestar's neck bristled. "What about them?"

"Before, Brightstar was about to jump into fighting and bloodshed. But now, she's . . . *gone*, and things will certainly change with you being leader." Sharpfang was speaking slowly. "What are we going to do about the portion of territory they stole from us, Icestar?"

Icestar looked down to his paws. *I've thought of what to do many times*, he thought. *But a clear answer is not crossing my mind.* "I'm not sure yet," he admit. "I don't want to fight, but we need the territory for prey."

Sharpfang nodded his head. "Exactly."

"This is something I'd have to discuss with Ashtail and the other senior warriors," he went on. "I need to know what everyone thinks of this."

"After all," Sharpfang added, "DarkClan has declared war on us long ago when you killed one of their warriors."

He sighed, remembering the battle between Fallentail and him.

That day had only happened because Fallentail enraged him for killing his mother, Featherbreeze. "That war was between Brightstar and Sandstar, and both of them are dead."

"You mean . . . the war is over?" Sharpfang whispered.

Icestail growled under his breath. "For me, it is. But it's different for Dewstar."

He wants to destroy us.

He looked up ahead and spotted the camp. Amberpaw dashed past him and called over her shoulder, "Race you to the camp, Rainwhisker!"

Rainwhisker, amused, ran after her. "I'm not an apprentice anymore!"

Icestar and Sharpfang trotted after them, entering the camp last. Most of the cats who were out on patrol were already back, sharing tongues with each other under the sun. Leaf-bare was here, so sooner or later, there'll be no more warmth like this . . .

He padded to the fresh-kill pile, and dropped his vole. Sharpfang and Rainwhisker dropped their catches as well, and Amberpaw ran off to her brother and sister, having caught nothing.

"Sharpfang!" Berrykit squeaked, leaping at her father.

Surprised, Sharpfang purred at the young kit. "Hi Berrykit. Where's Shadekit?"

"Oh, he's sleeping." Berrykit looked at the fresh-kill pile. "Ooh, did you catch that squirrel, Sharpfang?"

"I did," Sharpfang meowed.

"Can I have it?" Berrykit asked.

"You're too young for prey," Sharpfang objected.

"When can I have prey?" she whined.

"When Sagepelt says you can," he sighed. "Have you said hello to Icestar? It's quite rude to ignore your Clan leader like that."

Embarrassed, Berrykit turned to Icestar and dipped her head clumsily. "I'm sorry, Icestar!" she squeaked. "Hi!"

He purred, and nudged her ear. "You should go back to Sagepelt. Did you ask for her permission to come out like that?"

"Well . . . no," Berrykit mewed.

"Go along, and we won't tell her that you left," Sharpfang said sternly.

"I-I'm sorry. Thank you!" she called, running off back to the nursery.

Sharpfang sighed. "Well, now that she's gone, are you going to start choosing your patrol?" he asked. "I'd like to go with you."

"I already promised to take Amberpaw and Silverleaf," Icestar said apologetically. "But if you have a lot of energy, you could go on a different patrol. To scout the territory."

Sharpfang dipped his head. "Thank you." He padded off to the warriors den to chose which cats to go with him.

Icestar made his way to the makeshift nests that Windcloud and Grassheart slept on, and nudged them awake. Groggily, Grassheart's eyes opened. He looked up, and yawned.

"Yes, Icestar?" he murmured.

"It's time to take you and Windcloud home," he informed them. "Feeling all rested?"

Grassheart burst up, suddenly excited. "You bet I am!"

* * *

The patrol moved slowly since Windcloud was expecting kits. She wasn't as fast as she was when they ran away from DarkClan, but she had gotten slower ever since that day. Silverleaf and her talked

quietly side-by-side as Icestar and Grassheart led the patrol through MoonClan's territory and into CloudClan's.

Amberpaw excitedly scanned the area all around them as they crossed into the unfamiliar territory.

"It's been nice, being in MoonClan as a guest," Grassheart meowed to Icestar, "But I can't wait to return to CloudClan. I wonder if anything had changed?"

"You've only been gone for almost a quarter-moon," Icestar pointed out. "I'm sure nothing had changed on the moors."

Grassheart sighed. "I can't wait to get into the open air again, and feel the wind on my fur and the sky touching my paws . . ."

Amberpaw tilted her head. "Isn't it cold when it's windy?"

"Not really. We're used to withstanding the weather," Grassheart responded.

"What about rain? Isn't it wet without trees to cover you from the sky?" she pressed on.

"Well . . . when it's rainy, we could hide in our dens."

"But what about—"

"Amberpaw," Icestar cut her off. "You shouldn't be asking Grassheart too many questions. That's very rude." He cast a glance at his apprentice, and she bent her head down.

"Sorry," she apologized.

Grassheart gave Icestar a look of thanks before turning up ahead to continue walking. They were passing the last tree of the forest. After that tree, there would only be grass and plains and the moor. It excited Icestar himself of being somewhere other than MoonClan territory.

As he walked over the moor, a different sensation filled him. The grass under his paws were longer and harder, strong for

withstanding wind. The scent of the air was not leafy anymore, and instead, he could smell the open sky and the grass and rabbit droppings within small nearby burrows. He suddenly felt free with all of this open space around him.

"Icestar looks like he's having a good time," Windcloud whispered to Silverleaf.

Silverleaf laughed a bit. "Icestar hates feeling confined."

Icestar turned around. "Only in dark, cold places I am," he pointed out. "The forest will always be my home."

"You must be CloudClan at heart, then," Grassheart joked.

Their whiskers twitched as Icestar rolled his eyes. After some time walking, Windcloud began to pant with exhaustion.

"We'll be getting there soon, right?" she asked. "Traveling to camp is different than running away from cats who are trying to kill you."

"We will," Grassheart promised. "We're almost to the camp."

For a little while longer, the continued to walk. Finally, though, Amberpaw raced down from ahead, and called eagerly, "I see their camp!" By this time, the sun had almost completely set, but it wasn't dark yet. Every cat sped up, mainly because Grassheart and Windcloud were eager to get back to their Clan.

They entered the camp through a small tunnel in the ground which was being guarded by two warriors. Both of them gave curious looks to the MoonClan cats, but said nothing about them once they saw Windcloud and Grassheart, greeting them with eager surprise.

Icestar observed the camp as soon as they got in. Heather, long grass and strong sticks were what barricaded the dirt clearing. The dens were caves in the grounds, and everywhere, cats were sharing tongues and talking nervously. Immediately, though, everyone looked up, realizing who was standing just at the front of the camp.

"Swiftstar!" a warrior gasped. "There's MoonClan cats in the camp! And you won't believe who's back—"

Grassheart stood taller. "Swiftstar, Windcloud and I have returned home."

Swiftstar padded out of his den quickly, and looked right at the two warriors. "Y-you're back!" the CloudClan leader whispered with shock. "I thought you'd never return!"

Chapter Fifty

Edited ✔

Hey guys, sorry I took long for this and the last update :(and yay, I'm finally updating a LONG chapter! Also, could you please check out @thislittlefreak's book: ColdClan; A Warriors Tale? It's really cool and unique and well-written, I think it deserves more reads ^o^

@thislittlefreak
@thislittlefreak
@thislittlefreak

Btw guys, there'll be a big surprise later on. Read to find out!!

Grassheart stood right beside Windcloud as Swiftstar entered the clearing. "I thought you'd never return home," the CloudClan leader said honestly. "We were planning a rescue patrol to get the both of you back, but as we entered DarkClan's territory, their warriors pursued us because they outnumbered us. They told us you were already gone . . . We thought we were too late."

"I'm glad you're okay," Windcloud piped up. "I mean, after being chased by DarkClan? That must of been scary."

"We escaped," Grassheart added. "They probably didn't want you to know that we lived."

Swiftstar nodded with agreement and touched their noses with his own. "I'm glad you've returned safely."

A CloudClan apprentice stood taller. "But we outran them, of course. You must've as well!"

Icestar grimly listened to the CloudClan cats welcome their warriors back. *It seems that MoonClan is not the only Clan having troubles with DarkClan,* Icestar thought. *I wonder if Dewstar really wants to take*

over the Clans?

Swiftstar flicked his tail. "Silence, Skypaw. You should be getting back to your apprentice duties."

Skypaw roller his eyes before passing away, and Amberpaw stared at him and the other CloudClan apprentices curiously. Swiftstar turned his gaze to Icestar and the others now. "And why are MoonClan cats in my camp?" he asked.

Icestar looked back at him. "I was captured by DarkClan as well," he began, "but I escaped with your warriors."

"And we never would of made it without him," Grassheart put in. "After we escaped, we ran straight to MoonClan. They cared for our wounds for a while before we decided that we were strong enough to make the trip home."

Swiftstar looked at Icestar right in the eye. "Thank you for saving my warriors. They're valuable to our Clan, and I can't imagine life without them, Icetail. So thank you."

"I am called Icestar now," Icestar replied, looking down to his paws. "Brightstar died while saving us from the DarkClan warriors who chased us all the way over to MoonClan's borders."

Swiftstar's gaze saddened. "Her death will be honored amoung us."

Icestar dipped his head. "We thank you for that."

* * *

"Hurry up, Silverleaf, you're slowing down!" Amberpaw squeaked as she ran across the moor.

Silverleaf sighed. "Sorry!"

Icestar followed silently behind them by himself as Amberpaw tried to get Silverleaf to race. Swiftstar offered the MoonClan cats to stay the night because of their tiring travel, but he refused since Icestar knew that he, as Clan leader, had to be there for his Clan. The sun was already below the trees, so he knew he had to return quickly.

He wanted to see and talk to his Clanmates after a long day's work.

He was close to the forest by now, and his paws were tired after all the walking, but he was glad to be back to his own territory. They crossed the border back and entered into the MoonClan forest. As the branches became denser above-head, the good scents of home filled his nose.

"It's good to be back," Silverleaf said with a sigh of relief. She held her muzzle up in the fresh forest scent, and breathed it in.

Icestar nodded with agreement and breathed the forest scent as well. "Are you tired yet?"

"Definetly. I don't know what's happened to Amberpaw, but she seems so active. I told her I didn't want to race but she made me do it anyway!" Silverleaf gave a purr of amusement.

"She gets like that sometimes." Icestar laughed as well. "But maybe she just gets like that when she sees or learns something new." He padded slower, relaxing. "I can't wait to get back to camp. There'll be so many new things I'll do."

"That's right, Ice*star*," Silverleaf teased. "Being leader will sure be tough. But you'll have all your Clanmates to rely on."

"That's right," he mumbled. He looked down to his paws. *I wonder if moments like these could last*, he thought. *I wonder if we can spend the leaf-bare without being bothered by DarkClan.*

Silverleaf's tired breath snapped him from his thoughts.

"I didn't know you were that tired," he piped up.

She shrugged. "I didn't eat much. I must not have that much energy . . ."

Amberpaw trotted up to her. "We can share the mouse I caught when we get back," she offered, holding up a piece of prey. It was a plump brown mouse, freshly killed.

"Where'd you catch that?" Icestar asked.

"Up ahead when you two were talking," Amberpaw meowed with pride. "I can't wait to show it to Blackpaw! It would of been brilliant if I caught a rabbit on that moor, though! Don't you think, Icestar?"

"It would have, but that's CloudClan's prey. Our only business with them was taking back their warriors to their camp," he said.

"And it's better that they're gone. We have two less mouths to feed now," Silverleaf added quietly.

Icestar understood why she'd say something like that. The big shortage of prey was still happening. Icestar and his Clanmates had just gotten used to it, growing skinner but leaner with less things to eat and more work to put in.

Ahead of him, he spotted the entrance. Eagerness filled his belly. Rainwhisker and Fireshade were on guard duty. The two of them dipped their head as he passed them, and he dipped his head back.

"Welcome Icestar," Rainwhisker said. "How was CloudClan?"

"Their conditions were good," Icestar said, recalling seeing two rabbits on there fresh-kill-pile. "It looked like they had just enough to eat."

"Good for them," mumbled Fireshade.

"You two can switch your duties with two younger warriors. I need all senior warriors in camp," he ordered. *I've got to start getting use to this leader thing and organizing the Clan*, he thought. *I really wish Brightstar were here.*

"Sure thing," said Rainwhisker.

All of them padded into camp. Amberpaw dropped her mouse by the apprentice den, and called Silverleaf over so they could share it. Goldenpaw and Blackpaw were doing their apprentice duties, helping the elders remove their ticks before bed. Goldsun was speaking to Squirreltail, pelts brushing and tails entwined. Dropeyes was sitting alone on her nest, probably deep in thought. He also spotted Sharpfang playing with his kits, with Sagepelt sleeping quietly in her nest.

He suspected that tonight would be a busy night. After all, every cat was too filled with energy to sleep.

Icestar searched around the camp for Ashtail and Flameheart, wondering where they were. He hoped that they hadn't went on a patrol. Not everyone was in camp; only half the senior warriors were here. *That'll have to do*, he thought. *I must speak with my Clan*.

"Icestar!" Ashtail called from behind. Icestar whipped around, and spotted Ashtail running up to him. "Hey, Icestar! I was looking for you. I thought you'd get back around now."

Icestar nodded. "I was looking for you too," he said. "Where's everyone?"

"Crowflight led the DarkClan patrol and has yet to return. He'll be back pretty soon," Ashtail began. "And a few warriors—only two—went out to the herb garden near the Twoleg place to collect things for Sweetheart. Hmm, let's see . . . I also sent Stonetooth and Dawnstripe on hunting patrols."

"Very good." Icestar nodded with approval. "Has everyone coped well?"

"Everyone's doing better now," Ashtail sighed, "though we're all pretty sad about Brightstar."

Icestar looked down. "I know. Hey, Ashtail, I need another favor. Could you bring Flameheart, Sharpfang, Rainwhisker, Swiftbreeze and Fireshade to the far end of the camp? I need a word with everyone."

Ashtail nodded and padded off into the warriors den, already gathering up three of the warriors. Icestar went to the far end of the camp, where he found Flameheart patiently sitting and thinking on his own.

"Hi, Flameheart," Icestar piped up. "What's on your mind?"

Flameheart looked surprised for a moment, before shaking his head. "N-nothing in particular." He sighed. "I was just remembering things."

Flameheart and Shiningmoon both have been gloomy for quite a few days . . . he thought. He wondered why, but thought that it was best not to ask. "I'm gathering a few cats here. We're going to have a small talk."

"I should go then," Flameheart meowed respectfully.

"No, it's okay," Icestar said. "You're a part of it."

"Alright." He sat back down. A moment later, Ashtail arrived with Fireshade, Sharpfang and Rainwhisker lined up behind him.

"Everyone's here," Ashtail informed.

"Good." Icestar turned to face everyone. "I've gathered you all here for a discussion," he began. "Now that I'm leader . . . things are going to be different. And I want to start it off by our conditions with DarkClan." *Brightstar and I had many different thoughts and opinions.*

"We're still not at war with them, are we?" asked Rainwhisker.

Sharpfang flicked his tail. "Most certianly not. That was Sandstar's and Brightstar's battle, but they're both dead."

Icestar remembered when he was captured, and was forced to speak with Dewstar in his den. Should he bring that up? He didn't want to disappoint his friends with the truth, but he also didn't want them to let their hopes down if something were to go wrong.

"I agree with Sharpfang," Flameheart murmured. "I'm tired of all of this war."

Icestar decided to speak of it. "I've said this before; it's up to Dewstar to decide. And it seems that it will most likely continue." He gave a deep sigh. "When I was talking with him the day I was at his camp, he made it clear that he wants to destroy us all. He told me . . . that he wanted to rule four Clans, and he didn't want MoonClan to be a part of his system."

"Unbelievable!" Swiftbreeze growled. "He was born *and* raised here! How could he easily turn his back on us like that?"

"Then we have to be ready!" growled Ashtail. "We've got to prepare our warriors and keep our territory safe. Dewstar had already turned his back, Swiftbreeze. The innocent Dewstar we once knew is long gone."

Icestar winced when Ashtail said that, but he forced himself to ignore the pain.

"I can help with training," Fireshade suggested.

"I wish this war was over," Flameheart whispered sadly.

Icestar turned to Flameheart. "Maybe we will have to continue it," he murmured to his friend. "I'm sorry. I wish we all had a break from it too, especially because of this harsh leaf-bare." Then, he turned to Fireshade. "And perhaps you can be in charge of training, if it's not too much."

"It won't be," Fireshade meowed. He then gave Flameheart a sympathetic look. "We're sorry you might have to fight your old Clan and friends. We never wanted this to happen."

"It's okay. They make most things hard for us. DarkClan is just bringing this on themselves," Flameheart said bitterly.

Rainwhisker extended his claws. "They're not making *anything* easier for us," snarled the warrior. "I wish DarkClan would just accept bounderies like any normal Clan. Their territory is big enough already . . ."

"Speaking of territory," Icestar added, "I was thinking about taking back the portion of territory they stole from us as well. I wanted to know every cat's opinions on this matter."

"More bloodshed!" muttered Swiftbreeze. "I don't think a battle is such a good idea."

Me neither, Icestar thought. *I'm frightened of the idea of my Clanmates getting hurt, or of meeting my brother in battle.* He imagined the pain it would be to fight Dewstar. It would be the worst thing in the world—he hoped that his concluding decision would be the right answer. After all, Dewstar was one of the only close kin he had left.

He barely even knew his sister, Lilyclaw.

"We should steal the territory back," Sharpfang snapped to Swiftbreeze. "We need more prey, and that territory was *ours* to begin with."

"But we can't just pick fights!" Swiftbreeze put in. "It could be meaningless."

Ashtail shook his head. "Let's wait it out," he suggested. "The gathering is going to take place in less than a quarter-moon. If Dewstar mentions anything about a war, we'll have our answer of whether we will fight them or not."

"That's better," Flameheart said with a sigh.

"Maybe that would be smart," Icestar murmured. "I suppose our concluding decision is to wait it out until the night of the gathering." He wrapped his tail around his paws. "I want to be ready just in case anything is to happen. We need more training patrols, and we should have older cats thicken the camp barriers. That way, we would be prepared for anything."

"What about hunting patrols? If we do more training patrols, our hunting patrols could be reduced," Ashtail pointed out. "We need as many hunters out there as possible."

"I know," Icestar said. "In the meantime, I am going to lower any extra watch patrols. We'll still have cats watching the DarkClan borders at night, but we don't need to send out more cats throughout the day if we want to get this done. After all, we can't tire ourselves out."

"That's actually not a bad idea," Rainwhisker murmured.

Fireshade purred. "You're being a great leader already, Icestar. I'm glad you were the cat chosen to be MoonClan's next leader."

"I'm just looking out for the Clan," Icestar said, embarrassed. "Any cat would do the same." He looked up at the sky. "It's already dark. Are the patrols back, Ashtail?"

"I saw them walk in moments ago," Ashtail informed.

"Great. I think it's time we went to sleep," Icestar murmured. "We're done for the night, and we'll organize this tomorrow."

Sharpfang, Rainwhisker, Fireshade and Flameheart all murmured their goodbyes before making their way to the warriors den. Ashtail went off to the medicine den, probably to check how things are going.

Swiftbreeze padded up to Icestar. "If you'd like, maybe I could lead the watch patrol tonight?" she asked. "I hadn't done much but border patrolling today, so I feel all rested up."

"That will be fine by me," Icestar said. "Hey, could you take Dropeyes with you? She seems upset about something. Perhaps you could talk to her?"

"Sure. I'll also take Redsky." Swiftbreeze turned and padded away. "Goodnight, Icestar!" she called over her shoulder.

"Have a good night," he meowed back before padding off to his own nest.

* * *

Silverleaf slept by Icestar during the whole night in the leader's den. Even though her presence was comforting beside him, rest could not come easy. He was afraid of Dewstar and DarkClan since he knew that they could strike at any time. He didn't even know what Dewstar was planning, and that thought alone made him feel unsafe.

He thought of the duties he was supposed to do the next day as leader—join patrols, make sure his Clanmates were alright, train Amberpaw—anything else would have to come up on its own time.

Icestar also wondered how the prey would do the next day, and how things will turn out. With all these thoughts in his mind, he soon fell into a deep sleep. The memory of Darkstar surged through his mind as he slept, her image returning from the nine lives dream he had at the Night Flower.

A life of light, those words ran through his head, *my ninth life is light.*

The next morning, Icestar woke up once more to find Silverleaf missing. He yawned and padded outside of his den, wondering where she had gone off to. He looked up at the sky to see that dawn was just approaching. The cold breeze whipped at Icestar's fur.

"Good morning," Ashtail greeted Icestar. "You seemed to have slept well."

"Well enough," Icestar agreed. "Have the dawn border patrols been sent out yet?" He looked around the camp to see that already some cats were missing.

"I sent a few cats out to StreamClan and CloudClan," Ashtail explained.

Icestar nodded. "Great. Once they get back, send two more to DarkClan and MarshClan. Don't forget hunting patrols as well."

"I got it."

"Have you seen Silverleaf, by the way?" Icestar asked. "She wasn't there when I woke up."

"She went to go help Sweetheart with something. She'll be out herb collecting with her maybe up until the sun is fully up," Ashtail replied.

Icestar nodded again. "Thank you." He padded away, and sniffed the camp to see who was still here. All of the apprentices were sleeping in their dens, as well as half the remaining warriors. He went off to the apprentice's den, and nudged Amberpaw awake. He decided that he would take her out battle training. "Get up, Amberpaw," he said.

Her eyes opened. "Give me . . . until dawn," she yawned, and her eyes closed once more as she went back to sleep.

"It is dawn, Amberpaw." He shoved her. "Wake up, we're going to train today."

Amberpaw looked up again. "Oh, g'morning," she murmured sleepily. Slowly, she stood up and gave a nice big stretch. Icestar heard the bones and muscles on her body crack and she sighed with relief. "Now that's better."

"Awake now?" Icestar asked. "We're going battle training today."

"I'm awake," Amberpaw mewed. "If we're going, then what are we waiting for?"

Icestar purred. "Follow me. We're going to go to the training hollow by the stream today," he told her. "That's my favorite training spot because it has the most recourses."

"Sounds fun!" Amberpaw squeaked.

Before Icestar could leave the camp, he was stopped by Dawnstripe. "Should I take Goldenpaw out hunting?" she asked Icestar.

"If you'd like," he responded. "Oh, and wake up Blackpaw for me. Volefur might go looking for him pretty soon. I think it's still his turn with apprentice duties."

"On it," Dawnstripe said, before making her way toward the medicine den.

Icestar turned. "Let's go, Amberpaw." He lead her out of the entrance, immediately entering into MoonClan's beautiful and cold forest. Most of the leaves of the trees were already gone, and the air tasted cold and dry, with no trace of warmth left. Deep down, Icestar hoped for no snow, but it was obvious that this season was going to be freezing.

He padded silently through the forest, his paws crunching the stiff, frozen grass. The dark morning sky had no stars up above, so it was a little hard to see through the forest. He was thankful that the cats of MoonClan had good vision. He could see small figures of prey jumping from branch to branch in the treetops. He longed to go catch them, but he knew that he didn't stand a chance, since they were already at an advantage.

Icestar took a deep breath of the territory around him, taking in the

sharp, cold morning scent. His paw pads felt cold because of the grass, but he ignored it. His stomach was also growling from the sight of those prey up in the trees that just passed.

Finally, he began to hear the sound of water trickling. *We must be near the hollow,* he thought. Icestar kept padding on. "We're almost there," he told Amberpaw.

"I know," she meowed. "I can smell it." Her eyes widened.

"Is there something wrong, Amberpaw?" Icestar asked, suddenly getting a little worried. Amberpaw opened her mouth to speak, but already, a scent caught into Icestar's nose. DarkClan! They were here, weren't they? "Come on, Amberpaw!"

Icestar ran up ahead with Amberpaw at his heels, and he stopped right at the training hollow. Inside, he could make out two dark figures of two DarkClan cats. Around them, the training hollow was wrecked. The barriers were broken, the moss was torn to shreds, the branches of the trees were snapped, and there were even loose stones all over the clearing.

Icestar hissed, his fur fluffing up with rage. "What in StarClan's name are two DarkClan cats doing in my territory?" he demanded.

"We've come here regarding an important message from Dewstar," the she-cat meowed plainly. "He wanted you to know for sure . . . that there's a war between MoonClan and DarkClan. He did not want you to forget."

"What?" he snapped.

The tom nodded, his claws outstretching and his eyes widening with excitement. "He said in these exact words; Dewstar re-declares war on MoonClan! After all, the war between Brightstar and Sandstar is both over, considering the fact that they both are *dead*."

Hostility sparked in Icestar's eyes. "Get off my territory, crow-food!"

The she-cat turned to the tom. "Come on, let's go," she said. "Our work here is done." She walked right past Icestar, her gaze triumphant. The tom followed behind.

Amberpaw looked up to Icestar, her eyes wide with worry. For a moment, Icestar was frozen with shock. *I knew it. I just* knew *that Dewstar would do this,* he thought.

"Icestar," Amberpaw whispered with horror. "The training hollow is destroyed . . ."

"Fox-dung," Icestar cursed. "Dewstar is only making things worse for us!" He looked around the hollow. "Amberpaw, we have to fix this right away. Don't tell any cat what has happened here, I'll take care of that."

"Yes, Icestar," she murmured.

Icestar sighed. "I'm sorry we couldn't train today." Amberpaw just shrugged. "Start off by picking out the pebbles and stones. We can hurt our paws if they are left like that. I'm going to go on ahead to make sure that the DarkClan cats are gone."

"Okay," Amberpaw said glumly. Carefully, she climbed into the clearing, and began gathering the stones carefully between her teeth, and putting them in a pile at the far end of the hollow.

Icestar turned and ran from his spot. The scent of the two cats was still fresh in the air. He began to follow it, rage boiling up inside him. How *dare* Dewstar do this to the training hollow! He wondered if he could have stopped this if he had woken up and left the camp earlier.

He followed the scent quickly, running as fast as he could in the undergrowth. Icestar was heading closer and closer to the borders that DarkClan shared with MoonClan. The frosty grass under his paws crunched at every step, obviously letting out his presence.

Finally, he reached the DarkClan borders. He spotted the two cats who were in the training hollow within their own territory walking across to their side of the border.

"You'd better stay away!" Icestar spat. "Tell Dewstar that I won't take his challenge lightly."

"See you," the tom meowed, disappearing into the shadows of

DarkClan territory. The she-cat gave him one last glance before disappearing right after him.

Good riddance! he thought. DarkClan had better not come again. Now he knew that he really had to be prpared for what was going to come . . .

* * *

"Keep the apprentices away from the training hollow," Icestar ordered. He was talking to Ashtail alone in his den about the event that had just occured recently. "They do not need to see what happened to it. For now, we will train our apprentices as far away from DarkClan as possible."

He had returned to camp with Amberpaw just a little while ago after clearing out all the sticks and stones from the training hollow. It would have to be repaired as soon as possible. Now, he was discussing the events with his deputy.

"And what about Dewstar's challenge?" Ashtail asked, worried. "That weakling would not stand a chance if there will really be a war!"

Icestar looked down to his paws. "I'm going to try to talk to Dewstar at the next gathering. I want to confirm this. Even though two DarkClan warriors sent this message personally, I don't know if I can trust them. They might just be trying to scare us."

Ashtail shook his head. "Or they're telling the truth."

"That's why I am not going to take any chances," Icestar went on. "Do not let any warriors know what happened. Don't send patrols near the training hollow, either. I do want you to send a few cats to repair it, though."

"Alright," Ashtail meowed with a sigh. "I'll send Sharpfang and two others."

"No, I want Sharpfang with me," Icestar murmured. "His skills in battle are valuable. He should help with training the apprentices—especially with the warriors since they are more advanced fighters."

Ashtail gave a deep sigh. "This is terrible . . . this war should *not* be happening!"

Icestar rest a tail on Ashtail's shoulders as a sign of comfort. *You're right, it shouldn't be,* he thought. *It's all because of my kin. I wish it wouldn't have to be like this.*

"Is there anything that should be reported?" Icestar asked finally, wondering if there was anything else to be discussed.

"Two things. Me and a few others found a good hunting spot near MarshClan's borders," Ashtail informed. "It's a good training spot for the apprentices to hunt and for us to catch prey."

"What's the second thing?"

"It's Silverleaf. She's near the stream, she wanted to talk to you about something. Sweetheart told me this, anyways." Ashtail shrugged. "I think Sweeheart's herb supplies are running low. Maybe that's what it's about."

"Okay, thank you. I'll go look for her," Icestar said. He exited the camp, wondering which herbs Sweetheart was missing.

I sure do hope that we don't get an herb shortage this leaf-bare, he thought. *We already don't have much prey to spare!* He continued walking through the forest, thinking about the upcoming leaf-bare. Soon, he easily picked up Silverleaf's scent. He looked around, knowing that she was close.

Why did she want to talk out here? Perhaps she found something that she had to share . . . or what if she saw what happened to the training hollow? He hoped that she didn't see what has become of it. He hated when his Clanmates were stressed. Besides, it was the Clan leader's job to worry about those things.

Silverleaf's scent was becoming stronger and stronger the more he walked. He knew that she was close, he could practically hear her. "Silverleaf?" Icestar called out softly.

In just a moment, she appeared from behind a bush. "I'm here," she mewed.

"There you are," he said. "Ashtail told me you'd be out here. He said that you had to talk about something having to do with herbs—"

"It's nothing about herbs," she murmured. "That was just an excuse. The herb store is fine."

He nodded, feeling a little relieved that the herb stores were okay. *It would of been a problem if there was a shortage.* "Then what did you want to talk about?"

"W-well, I was out with Sweetheart all morning, and . . ."

"And what?" he urged.

Silverleaf sighed. "She told me something."

"I had a feeling that she'd tell you something, considering the fact that you were with her all morning," Icestar said, getting a little impatient. "But *what* did she tell you?"

"I'm expecting kits," she finally said. Icestar's heart stopped. "I was telling her about how I've been feeling strange these past few days, and . . . she told me that—"

"*Kits*?"

Silverleaf nodded.

"But we can't have kits," Icestar whispered. "It's leaf-bare, that's the worst time to have kits! And Dewstar . . ."

"Isn't this dumb war with DarkClan over?" Silverleaf asked.

Icestar shook his head. "No, it's not. Dewstar re-declared war on us. He wants to destroy us, Silverleaf. This battle isn't over. We can't have kits!"

"Well it's too late. I'm already expecting kits, Icestar!" Her frustrated tone made him shut his mouth in an instant. "There's nothing I can do about this so don't you *dare* raise your voice at me." Angrily, she stormed into the direction of camp.

"Wait!" he called.

She stopped. "What, are you mad?"

Icestar's eyes softened. "No, I'm not mad, it's just. . ." *It's just that I didn't want to have kits now,* he thought. *I wanted them after this war is over . . . after leaf-bare ends and after these bad times are gone.* "For a moment, I was scared," he murmured. "When Dewstar finds out, he'll want our kits."

"Why would he?" Silverleaf asked. "What have they ever done to him? They won't even be born for the next two or so moons."

Icestar was silent for a moment, wondering what to say. He knew he'd have to reveal the truth about him to her. He took a deep breath.

"Dewstar and I are descends of the first DarkClan leader, Darkstar," he began, his words slow. "I saw her at my nine lives ceremony. I know this because every leader of DarkClan is of her descent. Featherbreeze, my mother, was Sandstar's sister. She was supposed to be the leader before Sandstar, but . . . I just suppose she fell in love with Sparrowheart and wanted to raise her kits in MoonClan."

Silverleaf listened, her eyes wide with surprise.

"And Sharpfang told me that when we were born—Dewstar and I—a battle broke out, because DarkClan wanted us," he went on. "And your mother was from DarkClan too, Silverleaf. Ripplefur was mistreated there as a kit so Featherbreeze brought her here for a better life. But since you have DarkClan blood too, they tried to steal you and Squirreltail once. Remember?"

"I-I do remember," Silverleaf murmured. "I understand now. Sorry I got mad at you, Icestar."

"That doesn't matter. I'm sorry, too."

"But what'll we do?" Silverleaf asked. "Dewstar is bound to find out about this. If he really *does* want our kits, or if he really *does* want a fight, they could get hurt . . ."

Icestar shook his head. "Don't worry. I'll protect both you and our kits . . ." His eyes dimmed. "You'll be safe from this war no matter what."

a/n: EEEK! Icestar and Silverleaf having kits, who woulda thought that would happen any time soon? Well, there you go. That was the big surprise. And again, I am super-duper sorry for not posting in over two weeks.

And don't forget to check out @thislittlefreak's Warrior books! :D

Chapter Fifty One

[image]

Editing ✔

Gah, I suck. What up with the late updates?! (¯ (工) ¯)
Okay guys, so most of you might know this by now, but when I finish this book, there will be a SEQUAL. The media picture I posted is a preview of the sequel's cover and title . . . is it good? ;D anyways, on to the story!

Two sunrises later, Icestar woke up with a frosty feeling to his nose that made him feel a little bit cold and lightheaded. Slowly, he stood up, stretching his muscles after the tough night's sleep and gave a long, luxurious yawn. He crept out of the leader's den and eyed the camp around him. Everything was bright white. His eyes widened and he looked up at the sky. It was snowing!

For a moment, he took a few seconds to wake up completely as he stared at the snow slowly descending. A droplet of cold snow fell on his nose, and he sneezed, wiping it off. *I didn't expect snow to come this early in the season,* he thought with surprise.

Sweetheart was the first to greet him. "Morning, Icestar," she meowed. "I didn't expect you to be up this early. Nobody's awake yet except for Mousetail."

"I felt cold," he admitted. "Must've woken me up."

"If you want, I can put extra moss and feathers on your nest to make it warmer," she suggested. "It wouldn't be good if the Clan leader caught a fever."

Icestar shook his head, with one cat in mind. "I'd rather you give them to Silverleaf. When the kits come, they'll need to be warm, right?" Even though Silverleaf didn't want it, Icestar made her move to the nursery yesterday, and ever since then, he had been making sure of her comfort.

"She wouldn't appreciate being treated like that," Sweetheart advised. "I think she's going to snap your head off the next time you do something nice for her."

He sighed. "Sorry . . . I'm not good with this," he murmured. "I don't know how to raise kits. That thought makes me nervous." *And the thought of how everything could go wrong.* Sometimes, queens would have stillborn kits, or would die kitting, and those were some of the worse possible fears that haunted Icestar besides for his fear of Dewstar ever since Silverleaf told him that she was expecting.

"You're good with kits, last time I checked," Sweetheart purred. "I'm sure the both of you will do fine. Now let me get those moss and feathers to your nest."

Sweetheart was making her way toward her den by the time Icestar was about to object. He just decided to let her do it.

He trudged through the snow and crept into the warrior's den, prodding Ashtail awake.

"Good morning," murmured the sleepy deputy.

"Ashtail, get up," Icestar whispered. "We have to start waking everyone. It's time to set up patrols."

"Patrols," Ashtail repeated groggily. "Oh right, patrols." His eyes blinked open, and he met Icestar's eyes. "Is it snowing?"

"Go see for yourself," Icestar said, stepping out of the way so Ashtail could make his way out of the warrior's den. As soon as the deputy went outside, his eyes widened.

"I didn't expect snow so early in the season!" he gasped.

"I thought the same thing," Mousetail piped up from behind. "But don't worry. I hear that when we have cold leaf-bares, we will experience warm new-leafs."

Icestar dipped his head to the elder in respect. "Good morning, Mousetail."

"Morning, Icestar," Mousetail replied. "How is Silverleaf coming along?"

"She's fine, I hope," Icestar meowed. "Sweetheart said everything is normal, and I trust her." He watched as Ashtail woke up the warriors one by one in the warrior's den. "Besides, it's only the beginning. Nothing could possibly go wrong."

Mousetail purred. "They'll be fine kits." And with that, he went back to the elder's den and curled up in his nest, grooming out his pelt.

Icestar climbed the Moonrock, and examined his surroundings quietly in the camp. As the snow gently fell, Ashtail began to assign patrols for the territory. Dawnstripe padded out of the warrior's den, and met Icestar's eye, giving him a nod of greeting, followed by Swiftbreeze and Crowflight. Goldenpaw joined them as soon as they reached the camp entrance.

Maybe I should train Amberpaw today, he thought, watching the camp. Goldsun, Squirreltail, Shiningmoon and Redsky all padded out of the camp together as a group. He hoped that they were going a hunting patrol. There was barely a piece of prey on the fresh-kill pile, and he knew that MoonClan had to keep their strength up.

Volefur left the camp soon after, followed by his apprentice, Blackpaw, and Rainwhisker. The last patrol to leave the camp was with Fireshade, Sharpfang and Stonetooth.

Finally, after staring at the falling snow for a few moments, he decided to take Amberpaw out training. The gathering was so close now, only a day away. What if Dewstar launched an attack there again? What if he launched one *today*?

I have to be ready for everything, he thought, over and over again. *I can't let MoonClan get hurt. Not Silverleaf. Not my kits.*

He turned his head to the nursery.

I won't lose anyone else I care about . . .

Icestar looked down to his paws, which were being engulfed by the cold snow. Suddenly, a warm body pressed to his. Icestar jumped,

startled, and turned to see Silverleaf. She looked concerned.

"Icestar, you're so tense," she mewed, " . . . and cold."

He sighed, relieved. "You'll get cold too."

"I won't," she reassured him. "I thought you had left already. When I saw you, I wondered why you were alone."

He shrugged. "I was thinking." He shook his head. "No, it was nothing important. I'll be taking Amberpaw out training."

"At the hollow?"

"Err, no . . ." He didn't tell his Clanmates, especially Silverleaf about what happened to the training hollow. Well, except for Ashtail and the cats he assigned to rebuilding it. He didn't want any cat to worry, especially his mate.

Silverleaf left his side. "I'll go wake her. Be right back." She padded away, trudging through the piling snow towards the apprentice den.

Icestar shook the snow out of his fur, and then waited silently, pushing away his thoughts. Maybe he *shouldn't* worry—it was dangerous for any cat's mental health to be so obsessive over something. After a couple more heartbeats of waiting in the cold snow, Amberpaw finally came.

"Good morning, Amberpaw," he meowed to her. "Today we'll be training."

"I know, Silverleaf told me as soon as I woke up," she said with a yawn.

"Where'd she go?" he asked, realizing she wasn't next to her.

Silverleaf's tail touched Icestar's back. "Here I am. I would love to join you both just to watch—"

"—but you can't because you're expecting kits," Icestar cut off.

She gave a miserable sigh. "This is more boring than I thought it

would be, and it's only the second day."

He touched his nose to her ear. "I'll be back before sunhigh," he murmured in her ear. "See you then."

"If I don't die of boredom," she mumbled with annoyance, heading to the nursery.

Sweetheart's right. She does look like she wants to snap my head off, he thought. *Is it because I worry too much?*

"Let's go train!" Amberpaw urged.

Icestar gave a purr of amusement. "Alright, I'm going."

* * *

"This is a badger defense, but this move is very beneficial for fighting a cat, too." Icestar was having a private training session with Amberpaw just as he promised. They would of had it two days ago in the training hollow if the DarkClan cats hadn't destroyed it. He was glad Amberpaw never told any cat what really happened.

Icestar got into position, ready to demonstrate. "Leap over the cat you're fighting, Amberpaw. Got it?"

"Yeah," Amberpaw said. She got herself into a leaping position, and pounced into the air, shooting over Icestar's back and landing right in front of him. "I've practiced that with Goldenpaw lots of times."

"That's good to hear, but you got to be quicker than that. If you didn't turn around fast enough, I would of knocked you off your paws; like this!" Without a warning, Icestar lunged at his apprentice and easily knocked her over by grappling around her legs with his forepaws, kicking her over before she could give a reaction.

"I wasn't ready!" she gasped, standing back up quickly.

Icestar snarled. "I'm a DarkClan warrior ready to attack camp!" he threatened. "What will you do?"

Amberpaw snarled back at him and charged. She swiped at him

clumsily, still shocked at this sudden challenge, and he dodged her easily, being the more skilled fighter. Immediately, Icestar leaped over Amberpaw and landed by her rear, swiftly turning around and chomping onto her tail.

Amberpaw screeched. "Yeow!"

Icestar purred. "Your reaction was not fast enough, either." He padded back to face her. "You are a superb fighter, Amberpaw, you really are. Your skills in strength are excellent, and you are very smart." Amberpaw's face lit up with pride. "But you are not fast enough."

"I'm working on it!" she mewed. "Really!"

"I believe you, but that's not good enough." He sat down. "This move is not used on cats for a reason; this is because badgers are slow and cats are fast. It's not always successful on cats because they're much quicker than what is needed. So before this move, you must work on speed."

"Speed," Amberpaw murmured. "How do I work on speed?"

Icestar leaped from his spot and pinned her down, and she gasped with surprise. "Like this," he said. "You need to be able to have fast reflex."

"Stop unexpectedly attacking me like that!" she exclaimed, pushing Icestar off. "That's completely not fair."

"It would be fair if I were a DarkClan cat, though, huh?" he asked.

She shrugged. "How do I work on speed?"

"You'll be as fast as me when you are able to pin me down without me using reflex back on you," he explained. "I may be stronger, but your smaller size can make you quicker. Use that to your advantage, that's how CloudClan cats fight."

Amberpaw stared at him. "I'll try . . ." He nodded with approval, and suddenly, without a warning, Amberpaw landed a blow into Icestar's cheek with unsheathed claws, but he shoved her away,

getting into a fighting position. "I got a blow on you!" she cheered.

"*Sheathe* your claws, Amberpaw," Icestar said with a warning meow. A tiny droplet of blood trickled down his face.

"Oh my StarClan, are you alright?" she asked, examining his scratch. "I didn't hurt you or anything?"

"No." He licked his paw and cleaned the cut, wiping the blood off. "It's fine." The snow was burying Amberpaw's and Icestar's legs. "We should move up into the trees. There'll be more cover under the twigs," he suggested. "And practicing battle moves on a branch can help with balance."

"Okay!" Amberpaw said, gripping an oak tree to climb upwards. The branches above looked sturdy enough to hold the both of them—Amberpaw chose a good spot. He followed his apprentice up the tree, making sure that she wouldn't fall downward because her claws were still not as sharp and developed as Icestar's.

I wish I let Silverleaf come with us, he thought as he followed his apprentice up the tree. *I feel like I overreacted*. Besides, he would of loved having Silverleaf clean the cut that Amberpaw gave him. He loved it when she groomed his fur.

Amberpaw reached a good enough branch that was right under the cover of twigs, just like he requested. It was a perfect spot. Silverleaf would of wanted to see this, too. The view was amazing; the forest was blanketed in thick pure white snow, making the naked oak trees and distant pine trees beautiful. He wondered if he would have a daughter. *Snowkit is a nice name*, he thought.

Suddenly, Amberpaw leaped over Icestar and swiftly flipped around before he could react, pretending to slash his nose. "There, I got you!" she gasped.

"Good job," Icestar purred. He got up, balancing himself on the thick branch. "Next, you're going to have to learn something harder."

"What is that?" Amberpaw asked with curiosity and excitement.

He looked down at her. "When you're leaping, turn your back legs, and while turning, rake your claws on the enemy's back."

"That *does* sound difficult," she murmured.

He nodded. "Exactly. Now let's get working on it, we're going to have a long morning."

* * *

A day passed, and Icestar already decided who he was going to take to the gathering earlier that day. Yesterday, when he came back during sunhigh, he was exhausted with Amberpaw after training too much, but he left right after settling Amberpaw down and checking on Silverleaf before going go on a hunting patrol near DarkClan. Everyone thought he was mouse-brained since he was already wasted.

Today, though, his muscles ached after the previous day's worth of exercise, plus the additional two border patrols he had done that day, and the one hunting patrol he went on with his apprentice.

He lead his Clan to the Gathering, anxious about what was going to happen. He reluctantly decided to take Silverleaf along with them because she reasoned with him that this would be her last gathering for a few moons, and he also took Blackpaw and Goldenpaw, leaving a tired Amberpaw out. Most of the warriors accompanied him, and of course he took Ashtail, since he was deputy.

Icestar was nervous about taking a confident amount of warriors with him. *What if Dewstar decides to attack the camp while I am at the gathering?* he thought. *Something bad is bound to happen, I know it! Maybe I should of left Silverleaf behind.*

A familiar presence padded up right beside him. It was Flameheart. "Icestar," the warrior whispered. "Is something wrong? You look very tense."

He knew that he couldn't tell the truth. "Well, it's my first gathering as a leader, and . . ." Icestar trailed off, not knowing how to support his excuse.

"You never get nervous from these kinds of things." Flameheart always noticed the little things. "Are you fearful of Dewstar?"

Icestar sighed. "A bit." He knew deep down that he had more than a bit of fear of his brother. His fear was the size of the five Clans combined.

"Don't worry," reassured Flameheart. "We will all be there for you, so DarkClan will definitely not try anything stupid." He paused. "Besides, we have the other four Clans to back us up."

"We didn't have their backup last time," Icestar muttered bitterly. "Every other leader just thought that they should abandon us there while we dealt with our own problem."

He kept on leading every cat through MoonClan's territory. He was close to exiting the borders. The dark snow was barely visible from the lack of light, but the moon provided enough for Icestar to see ahead. His paws felt cold from being in the cold for too long.

Flameheart looked confident in the dark light. Icestar could make out his bright amber eyes easily. "Don't stress about things that are yet to happen. It's not good for any of us, especially you."

Icestar gave his best face. "Thanks, Flameheart. I'll try."

"We're all noticing how you're changing," Flameheart added more quietly. "You're showing a darker part of yourself . . ."

Icestar tried not to let those words make him even more scared. *Am I becoming . . . dark?*

"We're almost there," he said, trying to change the topic. He didn't want to add another stressful thing to his feelings and thoughts. *This makes me worry of the prophecy. What if I am the darkness that was never meant to be?* Ridiculous! *I already know the answer to that! I shouldn't put these thoughts in my head.*

Finally, they were there after a few more minutes of walking. Icestar padded close to Silverleaf. "Please avoid any of DarkClan's warriors," he whispered in her ear.

"I wasn't planning on sticking close to them anyway," she whispered back. "Don't worry about me."

She padded on ahead, and Icestar trotted back to the front of the group. He lead them into the gathering place. Last moon when he was here, it was him as deputy and Brightstar as leader. But now everything felt different. He looked up. StreamClan and DarkClan were the only two Clans here. He glanced at his brother, Dewstar, and unease prickled at his paws.

He watched his Clan file out into the gathering place away from DarkClan's warriors. Icestar went to his own place, the leader's rock, and climbed right onto it.

Lakestar dipped his head in greeting, curiously gleaming in his eyes. "It's nice to see you, Icetail. Where's Brightstar?"

"I don't go by Icetail anymore. Brightstar lost her final life a few nights ago, so now I am Icestar," he explained sadly, trying to keep his head high. This was not a time to grieve for his leader. He must remember her with pride and love.

"We honor your previous leader's death, and welcome you as her successor," meowed the StreamClan leader.

"Thank you."

Dewstar met Icestar's gaze. "A leader now, huh?" the white warrior asked. "I never expected that out of you." He flicked his tail. "Yet alone, never a good warrior."

Icestar felt a little annoyed. "You were never there while I was a warrior," he spat. "You never were."

"I believe we were made warriors together," Dewstar hissed. "You never were a good warrior when I *was* with you. MoonClan is full of a bunch of weaklings."

A few MoonClan cats spat with outrage. "You're a traitor and a coward, Dewstar!" Crowflight yowled.

"Well, good to see that you're happy with your new Clan," Icestar

growled. "Stay out of my Clan's business and don't you dare try anything with us!"

Dewstar opened his mouth to make a retort, but Lakestar stood between the two abruptly. "This is a gathering," he meowed angrily. "There shall be no fighting between us. We'll displease StarClan!"

"Like those fools actually watch us," Dewstar muttered, sitting back.

Lakestar didn't say anything after that, and neither did Icestar. *He doesn't want to believe in StarClan anymore,* Icestar thought. *Is that it? Can a cat stray this far from where he came from?*

Finally, Swiftstar arrived into the gathering, followed shortly after by Stonestar. Lakestar was the cat to address that the gathering should begin.

"I will start the gathering," meowed StreamClan's leader. Icestar glanced at the tom. "Our river, thankfully, has not frozen up even though this leaf-bare is cold. The fish are enough for our Clan and we're doing great. We've also had a new apprentice, Soulpaw."

"Soulpaw! Soulpaw!" almost every cat changed. Some remained silent and in the shadows, huddling together from the cold.

"Leafbare has also been quiet. StreamClan is thankful that we have StarClan watching us." Lakestar sat down. "I am finished. Swiftstar, would you like to go next?"

Swiftstar nodded. "Gladly." He sat up, and glanced down to the Clans. Icestar remembered that he had just recently visited Swiftstar just days ago. "To start off, CloudClan has been well. We've been defending our borders smoothly from every cat that acts to trespass." He gave a glance at Dewstar.

The DarkClan leader just snorted, and Icestar watched silently. *That was an obvious threat,* he thought.

"And like StreamClan, our prey is plentiful even with the snow coming down on our moors," Swiftstar announced. "We also have a new queen in the nursery; Windcloud. She is expecting Greenheart's kits."

Icestar purred to himself, recalling the two warriors. He wondered how they were doing; they obviously weren't here, he couldn't see them anywhere in the gathering place.

"There is also bad news. We still have been finding cats trespassing into our territory," he growled. "I think we all know who they are."

"DarkClan cats," growled a MoonClan warrior. It sounded like Fireshade.

"Shh," Ashtail abruptly hushed.

A couple DarkClan warriors shifted uncomfortably, and others were obviously aggravated. Dewstar glanced at his cats as if secretly telling them to settle down, as if he wanted to hide that it was him who was crossing the borders even though every cat knew he didn't respect boundaries. After all, he *did* say he wanted to take over the Clans—Icestar was not surprised that Dewstar felt the obligation to cross other's territories. Anger flared up inside of him from that thought.

"That concludes this moon's report of CloudClan's conditions." Swiftstar turned to look at Icestar. "Would you like to go next? I'm sure you have some important news."

Icestar nodded. "I do have news," he spoke up, his voice strong. A few cats looked confused, and he heard some asking where Brightstar was. "Just days ago, a DarkClan patrol killed off our leader, Brightstar," he announced. A few cats gasped, some weren't surprised. Icestar felt the grief for his leader return, and Dewstar's hard gaze fell upon Icestar.

"It was not DarkClan's fault. We merely had a border skirmish, and accidents happen!" Dewstar spat. "And I especially am not responsible, I wasn't there!"

Icestar snorted. "A border skirmish," he muttered. Brightstar died of a much nobler and sadder death than a border skirmish. "Don't interrupt me, Dewstar. It's my turn." He looked back down at everyone. "I received my nine lives and I am now renamed as Icestar, leader of MoonClan."

"Icestar! Icestar!" almost every cat chanted.

When the chanted died down, Icestar continued. "We also have a new queen," he said. He didn't want to share this news, but he knew that it was only fair. If Silverleaf didn't turn up in the gathering for over six moons, they're bound to know something happened. "Silverleaf just recently moved to the nursery."

A few cats looked at her. She seemed to be uncomfortable with the extra attention.

"And to finish, our prey supply is fine enough for our survival. We are doing well." He sat down, and wrapped his tail around his paws, indicating the he was done. Icestar met Silverleaf's eyes, and he noticed that she could easily tell his emotions. Flameheart's eyes flickered with approval as well, and some of his cats seemed pleased.

He glared at Dewstar now. His brother's eyes were dark as he gazed down at the Clans.

The MarshClan leader stood up this time. Stonestar stared down proudly. "I will go next, if Dewstar does not object."

"Go ahead," Dewstar muttered coldly.

Stonestar nodded with approval. "Good, and I'll start off with a warning. Just recently, we found a fox den with three grown foxes living inside. They're most likely going to stay here for leaf-bare if they think that our prey is worth stealing." She looked at the Clan leaders. "I suggest that everyone should keep a look out just in case these foxes cross their borders."

"Thank you," Swiftstar said. Icestar also mumbled his thanks.

"Also, we have been doing well. Since leaf-bare began, prey has been hiding under the rocky plains in our territory, and we can easily catch them. Our Clan is thriving well enough for this leaf-bare, and soon, we'll have apprentices being made into warriors as soon as they pass their assessments." Stonestar's face swelled with pride. "That concludes my report."

MarshClan's lucky. They have it easy . . . no trouble with DarkClan, enough prey to support the whole Clan, Icestar thought. *StarClan, please help MoonClan as well!*

"It's my turn," Dewstar meowed, his voice booming over the cluster of cats. "DarkClan . . . has been doing well. Prey is plentiful for my Clan and snow barely covers our forest grounds due to the many amounts of trees we have."

He looked all around slowly. Icestar felt intimidated. "My warriors and apprentices are also training hard . . . harder than they ever have before for this rough leaf-bare," he went on. "And that's not the only reason. We are training harder than ever because we are declaring war." His gaze hardened. "That's right, war."

"War on who?" demanded Lakestar.

Dewstar looked over to the StreamClan leader. "Don't worry, I am not going to declare war on you, Lakestar. Not yet. I am re-declaring it on MoonClan, our oldest enemy."

Icestar's heart pounded faster. *Why in the name of StarClan would Dewstar want to announce such a thing?* he thought.

Dewstar stood taller, and looked right at the cats of MoonClan. "Both Brightstar and Sandstar are dead. Their battle was long over. This new battle belongs to me and my brother, Icestar."

Chapter Fifty Two

Edited ✔

Hi guys! Sorry that this chapter is shorter than usual, but it's very important. That is why I didn't make it any longer than just a few pages, hehe. Read on to find out why it is important! :D

The moon was still up in the night sky, but it was barely visible against the thick, gray clouds. Small droplets of cold white snow fell down onto the forest, going through the tree branches above Icestar's head. The cold wind pushed through his fur, and the snow on the ground dug into his paws.

The gathering was just a while ago, and soon it would be dawn—yet Icestar could not bring himself to sleep. Dewstar's threat was still heavy in his ears, that there was a new war. Of course, Icestar knew this himself before Dewstar mentioned it at the gathering. *Dewstar made it clear that we are having another war the day he wrecked the training hollow,* he thought. *But now, all of my Clanmates know. They all know . . . that there's going to be war.*

He continued walking through the forest, ignoring the cold in his paws. He needed to be alone, for he did not want to listen to the gossip of his Clanmates. He didn't want to think of what could go wrong. His fear of Dewstar and fear for his Clanmates was growing stronger by the day.

The snow didn't bother Icestar's eyes at all. What bothered him was the wind tugging at his fur, and the feeling of thorns piercing his heart. Now for sure, he couldn't avoid a battle with his brother. The prophecy he received seasons ago was finally taking place.

The darkness was never meant to be, and two cats high and proud will lead and destroy.

How on earth was Icestar going to accomplish the task of destroying

DarkClan when their odds seemed so low?

He felt the presence of another cat close behind him as he padded through the forest. Swiftly, he turned, expecting to see his worst fear. He didn't expect to see Ashtail. His deputy's worried gaze met Icestar's eyes.

"Are you all right?" Ashtail mewed. "Everyone's starting to notice that you've gone missing."

Icestar shook his head. "I'm not alright. I can't bring myself to face everyone."

Ashtail stared at him with concern. "Yet this war is far from your fault, you're scared. Why, Icestar? Dewstar is the cause, not you."

"I never thought I was the cause for this war. It's just . . . I'm scared that I'll have to confront Dewstar," he responded. "I mean, he betrayed us long ago. I know that. I've even fought him before, too. But Dewstar's still . . ."

"I know. He's still your brother, and you still care for him. Right?" Icestar could barely hear Ashtail's voice over the wind, but he understood.

Icestar gave a nod.

"You shouldn't be out in this storm," Ashtail went on, walking closer to Icestar. "You can get hurt."

Icestar didn't repsond.

Ashtail sighed. "Silverleaf almost came out herself before I offered. If you don't come back to camp, she'll go out looking for you."

"Don't let her leave the camp," he murmured. "It's dangerous for her."

Ashtail narrowed his eyes. "Can't you just come back? You can catch a cold!" he protested.

"Stop trying to convince me!" Icetail snapped. "I need time to think

away from everyone. I'll be back by the crack of dawn. If I don't return by then, I give you permission to look for me."

"But—" Ashtail meowed.

Icestar looked away. "I'm *ordering* you to leave me. I'm sorry, but just watch over the camp while I'm gone." Icestar turned and padded away. He felt bad for snapping at Ashtail like that, but he needed this time alone.

He felt Ashtail's eyes burn on his back as he disappeared in the undergrowth, away from the Clan. He felt disappointed in himself. He was letting Silverleaf and the rest of his friends down. He wanted to let everyone know that he wasn't running from his problems, because what he was doing surely looked like it.

I feel like a coward.

He padded farther and farther away, the snow whipping at his ears. He felt frost cling to his pelt, and icicles touch his tail. *I must look different. I must be a mess,* he thought. This was no time to clean his pelt, though.

Icestar kept on walking for longer, wondering how far he was going. He knew he still was within MoonClan's borders. He couldn't smell it, but he recognized the look of his territory so well. As he walked on, he hoped that Ashtail would actually listen to his orders. Of course he would, right? Ashtail was his loyal deputy, and Icestar was the leader. The leader's word was law.

As Icestar kept on walking, he realized how close he was getting to the old portion of MoonClan territory that Dewstar had stolen from them. He looked over the border, taking in the scents around him. There was barely any prey-scent, but he felt pained that there *was* some. MoonClan would be less hungry if it weren't for Dewstar.

He stared over the border, keeping to his own territory. Icestar shivered in the cold but he forced himself to ignore it.

After some time, the snow began to slowly stop. The calm after the storm finally arrived, and the wind quieted. Icestar looked up to the

sky, seeing that dawn was going to come very soon. He wondered if he should get back now that the snow stopped. He had been sitting there for quite a while.

Icestar decided that he should, and got up, readying himself to get back to camp. He was about to leave until he caught a familiar scent on his nose. Icestar tensed.

"Dewstar?" he growled. Why would his brother be here?

Dewstar padded out of the dark shade of his territory's trees. "Hello, Icestar."

Icestar's fur bristled. "What are *you* doing here?" he demanded. "This is MoonClan's territory!"

"As you can see, I did not cross onto your territory," Dewstar hissed. "Now, can I ask you what *you're* doing here, so close my *my* territory?"

"That's none of your business," snarled Icestar softly.

Dewstar narrowed his eyes. "I bet you were thinking about stealing my prey, huh?"

"I said that's none of your business!" snapped Icestar.

Dewstar sat down, keeping to his side of the border. "I'm not pleased to see you, but I was hoping that I would get a moment of alone time with you."

"I wasn't," Icestar snarled. "What do you want?"

Dewstar straightened his back. "A proposition. I saw your expression when I stated to all the Clans that we are at war. You looked angry—scared."

"But that doesn't mean I'm not ready, that I won't protect my Clan, Dewstar." He met Dewstar's gaze. They were so close together, alone, for the first time in a long time. Yet he felt so far away.

Dewstar's ears twitched. "I will give you two moons to make a

decision, Icestar. Remember how I wanted to take over the Clans? I will spare your friends if you do something for me."

"I'll never let you do that!" Icestar spat. "You'll never take MoonClan, not any Clan, as long as I live!"

"I wasn't finished," his brother snapped, causing Icestar to slowly take a step back in silence. "I'll spare your Clan, and even you, if you give up your leadership. I'm giving you two moons to decide this. Give up your Clan to me, and your territory, and run far away from here alone and never come back. That way, I'll let everyone live with no bloodshed."

Icestar's eyes were wide. Why would he give up his territory? The stars had looked down on this forest for countless seasons. The trees had protected him for endless moons. MoonClan had lived here in this forest their whole lives! The thought of leaving his precious home made him feel sick.

"If you don't, then I will wage this war and I'll kill every last cat in MoonClan, starting with the ones most closest to you," Dewstar finished.

Icestar shot up on his paws. "If you lay a claw on Silverleaf, I'll kill you!" he threatened. These words lay heavy in his throat. The thought of killing his own brother made Icestar tremble with fear.

"I'm giving you two moons to decide, Icestar," Dewstar spat. "You will either give up your leadership, or give up your friends."

"What happened to you?" Icestar yowled. He was still trembling. "They were your friends too! You grew up around these cats, just like me!"

Dewstar turned his back away, and began padding into the DarkClan forest. "Two moons, Icestar!" his brother called over his back, before disappearing into the darkness.

Icestar stared after Dewstar, pain gripping deep within. It felt as if there were many thorns and icicles piercing his heart all over again.

Chapter Fifty Three

Edited ✔

Icestar returned to camp just before dawn, as promised. Most of his Clanmates were already awake, their expressions worried. Sagepelt and her kits were fast asleep in the nursery, with Silverleaf anxiously sitting and waiting in her own nest. Flameheart was trying to console Ashtail as the deputy paced around the camp. Sharpfang, Crowflight and Stonetooth were speaking to each other in a concerned tone. They were still talking about Dewstar's threat and Icestar's sudden disappearance.

Icestar padded deeper into camp when he realized that nobody had noticed him enter.

"Icestar!" Swiftbreeze gasped as soon as she saw him. The cat she was sharing tongues with, Dawnstripe, looked up as well.

"Where've you been?" asked Dawnstripe with a breath of concern.

Icestar shook his head. "I went nowhere in particular," he meowed. "I was in the territory for the rest of the night. I just needed to think." He exchanged a glance between Swiftbreeze and Dawnstripe.

"It's good you're back," commented Sharpfang from behind. He padded right to Icestar's side. "Ashtail was worried that he'd done something wrong by letting you go out there alone."

Ashtail arrived at the mention of his name, along with Flameheart. "Was everything okay out there?" asked his deputy. "No cat is crazy enough to go out in a storm. Except for you, of course!" he added.

"It was just snowing so much," said Icestar. He decided not to mention Dewstar now. The first cat he wanted to tell was Ashtail, and he didn't want to make his Clanmates have something else to talk about.

Flameheart nodded with agreement. "You look crazy, too. Your fur is all frosty!"

"I suppose so," laughed Icestar. "I was out there all night. Anyways, Ashtail, it seems like the storm has died down for now. I think you should send out patrols now just in case it'll come back later on today."

"I'm on it," Ashtail meowed, walking to the warriors den to wake those who were still asleep. Everyone else dismissed themselves away, and went back to talking or going to Ashtail to join a patrol when they realized that Icestar was okay.

He thought about his apprentice as he watched the Clan get on with their morning business. He felt that he was too tired for morning training or patrols, and decided to sleep until sunhigh since he was up all night without a blink of sleep. He decided that he would send Amberpaw out with a patrol, to see how she managed without him.

"Flameheart!" Icestar called, padding up to his friend.

Flameheart was grooming his pelt from the white flakes of snow and the messiness of his fur from the wind. Icestar must look much worse than Flameheart since he was exposed to the storm for so long. "Is there anything you need?" he asked.

"I need you to take Amberpaw training or hunting today. I'm too tired now," he admitted.

"I understand. You've probably had a long night," Flameheart meowed sympathetically. "I'll take her when she wakes later on."

"Thank you, Flameheart." Icestar let a breath of relief. Today, he could rest. Perhaps in his sleep he might forget about everything that troubles him, everything that haunted him, everything that hurt him. Maybe he could find peace within a dream, or within no dreams at all. He just needed everything to be quiet for a little while.

Silverleaf padded outside of the nursery as he stood up. "You're back, Icestar," she said softly.

"I arrived a short while ago," Icestar said, nuzzling her. "You sound tired. Did you sleep at all?"

She shook her head. "I couldn't."

He beckoned her to his den. "You can stay with me. It'll be warmer that way." He gave her his best purr.

"I can't share a nest with a cat who's covered in snow!" she exclaimed playfully, examining him all over. "You should take a look at yourself in a patch of water. Your fur looks very . . . wild."

"It stormed last night," Icestar stated.

"I see that," Silverleaf said sarcastically.

He shrugged. "Let's go to sleep, okay? I'm *exhausted*!" He led her to his nest in the leader's den, curling up inside his comfortable spot before she took her spot next to him. He was grateful that it was silent. Silverleaf's warm scent engulfed him.

He felt her warm tongue brush over his fur, grooming it out just like Featherbreeze had done to him when he was a young kit. In enough time, Icestar fell asleep as Silverleaf groomed his fur, and the lingering scent of his mother emerged somewhere deep in his heart, warming himself from the inside out.

After everything that had happened in the last quarter-moon, that night was the first night of peace that he had in a while. But what he didn't realize was, it might be the last.

* * *

Icestar woke up at the touch of the warm sun. He could tell that it was sun-high right now from the way the sun reached into the den to touch his face. Right beside him, Silverleaf was sleeping softly. His eyes squinted against the bright light reflecting off of the white snow from the outside world, and he pressed closer to his mate, making sure that she wasn't cold.

He gave a long yawn, breathing in the fresh air. In just a moment, Ashtail's head poked into Icestar's den. "Icestar?" whispered his

deputy. "Are you awake, Icestar?"

"Come in, Ashtail," Icestar called softly. "Be quiet—Silverleaf's sleeping."

Ashtail nodded and padded inside of the den as quietly as he could. He sat a couple tail-lengths away from Icestar's nest before he began to speak. "I needed to tell you something rather urgent," he whispered. "It's about our borders . . . DarkClan moved them again."

Icestar shot up from his nest, and Silverleaf stirred but she didn't wake. "Where did they move the borders?" he demanded.

"It's terrible!" Ashtail went on. "They moved the entire scent-marker that separates us deeper within MoonClan territory. We met with a patrol now . . . and things aren't going well."

"Are we outnumbered?" Icestar asked.

"Just by a little."

I thought Dewstar was giving me two moons! thought the gray tom. *Was it a lie, or is he trying to start something else*? "Come on," Icestar meowed. "I'm going there myself. Whose patrol is this?"

"Swiftbreeze's," Ashtail responded. "I was leading a hunting patrol nearby, and I was able to see what was going on. It didn't look good. They need you there, now."

Icestar gave a last look to Silverleaf, and sighed. "I'm going to have to go," he decided. "Make sure there are well enough guards here in camp. And please send some warriors after me, just in case a battle breaks out."

"Alright," said Ashtail. "I'll catch up after I inform the Clan to be alert."

Ashtail raced out of the den, and Icestar followed, running outside the entrance of the camp as fast as his paws could take him. He weaved through the trees easily, slipping right under a bush before continuing swiftly down the path to the borders of DarkClan and MoonClan. There was a deep hint of fear in his chest—the battle

wouldn't happen now, would it?

Icestar continued to pound through the forest, leaving paw-prints in the cold white snow. His warm breath turned to fog, and his fur was on end. Why did everything have to go wrong when he simply wanted peace? Why did Dewstar have to listen to his stupid dream? *Why were we the ones chosen for this sad fate, anyways?* Icestar thought angrily. He wanted to hate StarClan and the Twilight Forest cats—it felt like they chose out his destiny long before he was even born.

Anger and fear and sadness clung to his heart. What if he were to meet Dewstar in battle? What if another one of his Clanmates got killed? Icestar was getting closer and closer to the borders, and his feelings were getting worse.

Finally, he reached the scent markers. In the distance, he could hear arguing and growling. Icestar followed the voices, running as fast as he could. He could see cats in the distance.

"—this territory belongs to *us* now!" yowled a DarkClan warrior. "It's not my fault that MoonClan can't properly protect their territory."

"We can protect our territory better than you can all hunt, thank you very much!" retorted Swiftbreeze. "Why don't you all just go back home before we fight?"

"If we were to fight, it's obvious of who will win," spat the warrior. He recognized her to be Lizardfang, the cat who guarded the prison den while Icestar and the other two CloudClan warriors were captured. He could also see Lilyclaw, his sister. Icestar gulped. *Please don't let me fight with my own sister*, he thought.

Shadowheart, who was right beside Swiftbreeze, stepped taller. "If you all leave, there will be no trouble," he growled.

"And give us back our territory!" yowled Rainwhisker.

"Never," hissed Deathfang, Shadowheart's sister. "This is *our* territory now!"

"We must make it clear to them," growled Pierceleaf, another

DarkClan warrior. Icestar remembered meeting the both of them in battle a long time ago. "Beetlenose, Yellowpaw, be ready to attack."

Icestar braced himself. He ran right in between the quarreling cats before anyone could make a move. Swiftbreeze looked surprised for a moment, and so did the DarkClan warriors.

"What is this about?" the MoonClan leader demanded. "Why is DarkClan moving their borders again?"

"Because we can, crowfood," spat Deathfang, the fur on her neck bristling.

Icestar gave her a cold stare, and managed to contain his composure even though she made his blood boil. "There shall be *no* fighting," he ordered. "Why don't you all go back to your own territory before things get bad?"

Yellowpaw's eyes widened with excitement, and Beetlenose gave them a look of disgust. Lizardfang seemed as if she were itching for a battle. Icestar could hear his own cats snarling, but no one dared to say a word.

Lilyclaw stood taller, nervous. "I say we all don't fight," the she-cat meowed. "I think Icestar is right."

"Just because he's your brother doesn't mean you have to be soft about him!" growled Deathfang with disapproval.

"At least I *have* feelings for my brother!" Lilyclaw shot back, glancing swiftly at Shadowheart. Deathfang and Shadowheart were littermates after all, but they never seemed to show any compassion or love for each other. Deathfang narrowed her eyes at Lilyclaw.

Icestar wanted to defend his sister, but he did not want to make it seem as if Deathfang was right. "It's best if we all just went home," the MoonClan leader said.

Out of the shadows, a familiar shape padded into the midst of the arguing Clans. It was none other than Dewstar. The white tom took his place in between Deathfang and Lilyclaw, and eyed the MoonClan warriors. "What is going on?"

"You stealing our territory, *that's* what's going on," snapped Swiftbreeze. Rainwhisker muttered an angry agreement.

Dewstar's demeanor was calm. "It was not my intention to steal territory, so I'll just have to dismiss my warriors," he meowed, eyeing Icestar.

"What?" gasped Lizardfang. "But I thought—"

"*Now*!" growled Dewstar. "An order is an order!"

Beetlenose sighed. "Come on, Yellowpaw," muttered the warrior as he went off into the shadows. Yellowpaw followed reluctantly, and so did Lizardfang and Deathfang. Lilyclaw looked back once at Icetar before she padded away, her tail drooping.

Icestar stood straighter. "Don't be surprised when we move our borders back to the way they were."

"Oh, I won't," Dewstar meowed, stepping closer. He leaned close to Icestar and whispered, "consider what I said, or things will be much worse than moving borders around." And with that, the DarkClan leader disappeared into his own territory after his Clanmates, chin held high and chest puffed out.

Icestar watched them go, taking in what Dewstar had said. He remembered their conversation that took place during the night; the threat of driving MoonClan into battle and killing off their warriors, or giving up his territory and joining Dewstar's ranks. He shuddered —the deal was still on, and he had two moons to decide what was best.

Ashtail dropped in beside Icestar. "I think it is time that we start moving back the borders," whispered the deputy. "You're spacing out."

Icestar snapped out of his trance. "I was? I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," Ashtail said. Then, he turned to every cat. "They want to hear you speak."

Icestar nodded. He knew what they must be feeling; *all hope is on*

the fate of the leader. The leader's words will comfort us. That is what Icestar himself had felt when he was a warrior. He stood up taller for his Clanmates and met their eyes, knowing that he would have to assume that role. "It is time we move back our borders. This will *not* happen again, we will *not* let DarkClan push us around like that."

"I can assure you it won't!" growled Swiftbreeze, "or I ought to teach those filthy warriors a lesson!"

"Let's get going," said Rainwhisker, already padding over the new borders.

"Rainwhisker, Swiftbreeze and I will remark the borders," Ashtail offered to Icestar. Then, he turned to the cats that he had brought with him. "Redsky and Rosepetal, may you go and patrol the perimeter in case of DarkClan cats?"

Rosepetal gave a nod, and said, "If I see any, I'll shred them," before she and Redsky went to patrol, talking together in hushed tones.

Icestar turned to who he had left to work with him—Shadowheart and Dawnstripe. "Come on," he said to them. "We're going to cover up the fresh DarkClan borders." The stench was fresh on their territory, and Icestar did not like it at all.

"Alright," said Dawnstripe, already getting to work.

Shadowheart followed slowly after, and gave Icestar a look of gratitude. "Thank you for stopping the fight . . ." murmured the quiet black-furred warrior. "I wouldn't of fancied fighting Deathfang. She's stronger than she looks."

Icestar purred. "No problem," he said. He hope he sounded confident. After all, giving his friends and Clanmates confidence and strength is what a leader is for. He went straight to work, covering up the scents of the new borders as Shadowheart went off to the opposite side.

Through the whole day of work, all he could think about was Dewstar and the horrible threat that followed.

Chapter Fifty Four

Edited ✔

When Icestar returned to camp with the rest of the patrol following, his paws felt like they were falling off. All day, Icestar, Shadowheart and Dawnstripe worked to cover up the putrid stench of the new DarkClan scent marker, and Ashtail and his group of cats had to remark a whole new MoonClan border. Icestar had never much enjoyed marking borders—it was always a lot of work, but today drew the line.

The patrol dispersed into the clearing where everyone shared tongues. Redsky, who had managed to catch a vole while patrolling the perimeter, dropped her fresh-kill on the prey pile, and went to go join her daughters as they spoke together by the warriors den.

Icestar went off to his own den, assuming that Silverleaf went to sleep in the nursery. His den was fresh with her scent, and he felt comforted as he lied down in his nest. For a moment, Icestar shut his eyes, focusing on peace and relaxation. The next moment, Ashtail padded into the leader's den, his expression worried.

"Hi, Icestar," said his deputy.

"Is there something wrong, Ashtail?" asked Icestar. "Everything is okay I presume?"

"Everything is doing just fine. It's just I was wondering about something," he went on, sitting right in front of Icestar's nest. "What was Dewstar whispering to you before he left? Where were you the night before, and why were you gone so long?"

Icestar stared up with surprise. "Ashtail . . ."

"I convinced myself that you haven't discussed it with me yet because you didn't want our Clanmates to worry, but you didn't even cast a small glance at me indicating that you wanted to talk."

Ashtail looked a little hurt. "If something bad is going on, I should know it, right? I'm your deputy, after all."

Icestar gave a small nod. "You're right," he murmured. He felt a little bad for not giving much consideration into speaking to Ashtail.

"Will you tell me anything that happened?" Ashtail asked.

Icestar nodded again. "I will now that you bring it up." He gave a deep sigh, and found himself spilling everything to Ashtail about what Dewstar told him. He explained in detail about Dewstar's threat and the decision between battle or giving up. "Dewstar really wants to lead all of the Clans," Icestar finished at last. "It has been his goal ever since he began . . . *murdering* cats."

Icestar didn't fancy saying 'murder' too much, the memory of it made him feel uncomfortable as he remembered all of Dewstar's last victims, including Vinetail and Sparrowheart. He also remembered the long-ago murder of his mother, Featherbreeze during his first battle as an apprentice.

"That's terrible," gasped Ashtail with wide eyes. "I didn't know how many things were going on! What do you think we should do about the decision, Icestar?"

Icestar looked to his paws. "Oh, I don't know," he murmured. "I could be risking our friends if I decide to battle . . . and who knows what will happen if I let all of you join Dewstar's ranks?"

Ashtail's sighed with concern. "You are right. This decision is a tough one." He paused. "I don't know why, but it seems Dewstar is desperate for power. Why do you think he wants to rule so many cats at once? It's a crazy thing to do if you really put your mind into thinking."

"He wants to follow his fate," Icestar responded.

"Fate?" growled Ashtail. "Fate's got nothing to do with the direction of a cat's life! It's *us* who chooses the path we take, not anyone else. StarClan just guides us, they don't tell us what to do."

"I don't think StarClan would of wanted Dewstar to reach this level of ambition," Icestar said. "He's deceiving himself."

"We have to talk him out of it, and maybe knock some sense into his head!" Ashtail looked deep into his leader's eyes.

"I tried talking to him many times, but he never listens."

Ashtail looked at the den wall. "There has to be something we can do!"

Icestar shook his head. "All we can do is decide," he murmured sadly. "This decision is for me to make, as leader of MoonClan. I am the one who has to decide the fate of our friends . . ."

"Maybe you can bring this up to the Clan," suggested Ashtail. "We must decide on it together before you give your answer to Dewstar."

"I'm not so sure."

"It's worth a try!" the deputy insisted. "Maybe we can even get CloudClan to cover us if something goes wrong?"

"Ashtail, that's thinking way ahead of time!" Icestar scolded. "And I don't think the cats of CloudClan would want to get involved in a fight between MoonClan and DarkClan."

"We won't know unless we will try," Ashtail went on. "DarkClan is huge—who knows what will happen if we battle them?"

Icestar's eyes widened. "You want to fight?" he asked. "Is that the decision you would make?" Icestar wasn't angry, he was curious. How could Ashtail decide that quickly?

"Of course I would choose to fight. I lived here my whole life, and we train apprentices into warriors for a reason." Ashtail's eyes began to grow determined. "We train so that we can fight for what we have. I don't want to give it up."

"I'll take it in to consideration," said the leader. He was impressed by Ashtail's quick thinking, and that got him wondering if he should have been the leader instead of Icestar. *Nonsense*, he thought.

Brightstar chose me as her deputy. There was something she saw in me, the same way I see something in Ashtail. I suppose we all have our own way of leading.

"Icestar!" Amberpaw called, running into his den. "Icestar, Sweetheart is calling you!"

"Why?" asked Icestar. "Did something happen?"

"She just said she needed you," Amberpaw said. "I think you should go see what happened. It sounded urgent."

Icestar stood up from his nest and shook the moss from his pelt. "Got it," he meowed. He turned to Ashtail and said, "Thank you for talking, but I can take it from here."

Ashtail looked happy to have talked with Icestar, and their conversation seemed to make the deputy think. "Come on, Amberpaw," Ashtail said, walking out of the den. "Let's let Icestar handle this."

Amberpaw nodded, and the two of them went off into the clearing to talk to everyone. Ashtail met Swiftbreeze by the camp entrance, while Amberpaw ran off to Flameheart and Blackpaw.

Icestar turned to the direction of Sweetheart's den, wondering what could she possibly want. As he got closer, he could see his mate in the den, along with the elder Stripeeyes. He rushed over, suddenly worried.

"Silverleaf," Icestar gasped as he entered the den. "Is everything alright? Is it the kits?"

"I ate something bad . . ." she murmured, her voice sounding as if she were in pain.

Sweetheart sighed. "Silverleaf told me she took a mouse from the fresh-kill pile and ate it. Afterword, she felt sick and I gave her yarrow to vomit it out, but she doesn't seem to look better." Then, she turned to Stripeeyes. "And he has a cough that won't go away, and I don't have the herbs for him." Worry sparked in her eyes. "What am I going to do, Icestar? I want get herbs I need but I can't

just leave them!"

"No, you can't," Icestar said. "I'll do it."

"But . . ." Sweetheart began to protest, but she held her tongue back. She took a swift glance at Stripeeyes. "Come with me. We need to talk." The medicine cat padded out of her den, and Icestar followed, confused.

What could she possibly want to talk about without her patients listening? Sweetheart stopped right outside Icestar's den and sat down. Her eyes were filled with worry and fear. Icestar sat right in front of the cream-colored she-cat, casting a glance at the medicine den. Silverleaf was soothingly licking Stripeeye's ear, who was having a cough of fits, and she murmured something in his ear that seemed to comfort and relax him. There was a new softness about Silverleaf that Icestar couldn't explain, but it was probably because of the kits that were coming.

He turned his attention back to Sweetheart. "What is it that you wanted to speak, away from them two?"

"I just didn't want Stripeeyes to hear this because he might take it wrong," Sweetheart murmured. "He's old and weak, and it's really cold out. He has whitecough, and it seems to be turning into greencough really fast."

Icestar's eyes widened. "Greencough?" he exclaimed. "Aren't you helping him? Why can't he know that he's sick?"

"I tried telling this to Stripeeyes, but he refused." Sweetheart gave a deep, worried sigh. "He's trying to act all tough but he won't stop coughing. And I'm doing everything I can but I do not have the right herbs to cure him! I used it all up on Blackpaw yesterday from a bad cough he had." The beautiful medicine cat's eyes clouded. "I'm a such a sorry excuse for a healer . . ."

Icestar rest his tail on Sweetheart's shoulder. "Don't say that, you're a great medicine cat! I'll get whatever herbs you need, as long as it cures Stripeeyes."

"Thank you, Icestar . . ." She sighed. "I suggest sending some cats out to the herb patch by the Twolegplace," Sweetheart meowed. "I haven't cleared the herbs out there and I'm sure there's catmint to be found. I can't leave Stripeeyes or Silverleaf, though. What if something bad happens? There's no one else in MoonClan who knows herbs like I do."

Suddenly, Icestar knew what to do. "You know, *I* remember a few things from Vinetail."

I even watched the medicine den for a night while Vinetail and Sweetheart—who was Sweetpaw back then—went to the Night Flower! he recalled. That memory was from so long ago, nearly at his early stages of apprenticeship when Silverleaf was but a little kit. He was surprised that he actually remembered.

"You do?" Sweetheart said with shock. "What do you know, Icestar?"

The leader fought hard in his memories to remember. Then he said, "Borage for bellyaches and fevers, right? Vinetail also told me its for queens, though I don't remember what for. Its petals are blue and small and star-shaped. Cobwebs are for closing wounds. Err . . . poppy seeds, for calming and it also reduces pain. I've used those tons of times."

"Very well, Icestar. That's a lot for someone who is inexperienced," Sweetheart praised. "Just in case, know a few more things while I'm out." Icestar nodded. "Dock is used to soothe scratches, okay? It's sort of a large leaf, and it has a tangy smell. The way you apply it is by first chewing it up, got it?"

Icestar buried that in his mind. "Okay, got it." *I hope I remember*, he thought. *It'll be bad if I let Sweetheart down*.

"I've also got a few feverfew plants. They also have a tangy smell and they're small and they look like daisies. If Stripeeyes starts to get a fever, or any cat in that case, give it to them, okay?" Sweetheart's eyes were shining. She must've loved talking about herbs.

"I got it," Icestar said. "Don't give me a whole lesson though. I

wouldn't remember it all."

"Okay, okay. Just one more thing," Sweetheart urged. "Just in case."

"Alright, that's fine," Icestar meowed with a sigh.

"This is for Silverleaf," Sweetheart informed him. "To soothe her bellyache, she'll need juniper berries. They're kind of blue little berries—I'm sure you'll know what they are the moment you see them. Okay . . . that's all. Tell me what I've told you."

"Err . . . Dock to soothe scratches, feverfew for fevers, and juniper berries for bellyaches." He paused. "Along with what I know, poppy seeds for soothing—"

"—it also keeps a cat's strength up," Sweetheart cut off.

"Yes, that too. And borage for bellyaches and fevers. Last, cobwebs for binding scratches. That's all I know now." He looked at Sweetheart hopefully. He didn't know how it was possible for one cat to know so much information regarding *herbs*. It must of been difficult, but he saw that Sweetheart must have a passion about it.

She gave a nod. "You are good to go."

"That's great," Icestar said. *And I'll be spending the rest of the day with my mate*, he thought. *This might not be so bad after all*. "Perhaps you should take two cats with you to protect you from the kittypets and help you carry back the herbs?"

Perhaps I can go over Dewstar's offer with all of this extra time, too.

"I was planning on it." Sweetheart turned to the warriors' den. "Rosepetal, Dropeyes," she called. The two had just finished sharing a mouse in front of the den and looked up. In an instant, both of the she-cats padded over to her. "Would you two go out with me to collect herbs? It's kind of urgent."

"I don't mind," Dropeyes said, and Rosepetal nodded of agreement.

Sweetheart glanced at the two gratefully before turning to the leader. "I trust you, Icestar. If anything, send someone to get me if it

comes to something you cannot handle." She took a quick glance at the medicine den. "Don't forget to give Silverleaf two poppy seeds, and a juniper berry to calm her bellyache, okay?"

"I will. Now off you go, the sooner you leave, the better it'll be for Stripeeyes," Icestar said, nosing her out of camp.

"See you soon, Icestar," Rosepetal said and at the same time, Dropeyes murmured a goodbye. Sweetheart led them out of camp, and Icestar breathed in a sigh. He hoped to StarClan that he could be a good cover-in for Sweetheart. He was MoonClan's leader, not medicine cat. But every once in a while he did deserve a rest from patrols and hunting . . .

He watched them leave the camp, and glanced at the medicine den. Stripeeyes seemed to have calmed from the coughing fit and was resting comfortably on his nest. Silverleaf was also in her own makeshift nest, but he was almost sure that she was awake.

Icestar padded over to the medicine den, stepping lightly and quietly. As he entered, he passed both Silverleaf and Stripeeyes to go to the back of the den, searching for what Sweetheart had ordered. *Juniper berry . . . small and blue*, he thought. Finally, he found them. There was only a few, and a couple of clearly rotten ones. He took a fresh one carefully in between his teeth and padded over to Silverleaf.

"Here, take this," Icestar quietly and softly said to her. "It'll soothe your bellyache."

The queen obediently chewed and ate it, and by her expression afterwords, she obviously did not like it. "I-it's not *that* bad," Silverleaf managed, a look of disgust on her face. "At least I'll get better."

"You will," Icestar agreed.

Silverleaf rest her head on her paws. "Anyways, did you switch your leader role to be a medicine cat?" she asked jokingly.

"Of course not. Sweetheart asked me to fill in for her until she gets

back," Icestar informed.

"What do you know about herbs?" she asked once more.

He purred. "Everything I need to know, that's it." Silverleaf made room on her nest for Icestar to lie down on, and he took the spot right beside her, drinking in her sweet scent and pressing close to her warm fur.

Icestar noticed that Silverleaf had changed a lot ever since she began to expect kits. Her fur was becoming more neatly groomed, perhaps from all her spare time she had to do so. She was getting skinner as well from the lack of prey, but her belly was getting plumper with their kits. Even her personality changed—she was becoming more softer and gentler and quieter. She always used to be talkative and was most of the time eager for a hunt, but she seemed tired now.

She lied her head down on his paws. "I can barely ever get a rest anymore," she murmured. "Our kits never seem to let me sleep." She shut her eyes, and Icestar was glad she did. She seemed to be getting better from her bellyache, and she looked like she needed sleep, too.

"They seem lively," Icestar responded, his voice low. The thought of it made him feel excited and scared at the same time. "How many kits do you think there will be?"

"I wouldn't know," she said.

"What would you name them?" he asked again. He doubted that he could come up with anything good himself. Things such as leader business and problems with DarkClan and Dewstar and the prophecy were always keeping his mind away from the topic of kits.

"I think I would name one . . . Lightkit." Silverleaf gave a deep sigh with her eyes still shut. "I am tired of this darkness. Aren't you? Maybe we just need a little light shed upon our Clan."

Icestar nodded as his eyes dimmed. "It is a good name." *We need light shed upon our Clan in these dark times*, he thought. *I'm tired of*

everything having to do with DarkClan and this wretched prophecy.

"Silverleaf," Icestar said, turning to face her. It felt wrong hiding things from his mate, and he wanted to tell her what was in his mind. "The other night, Dewstar told me something."

"Did you meet with him?" she asked, her fur bristling.

Icestar shook his head. "I didn't, he came to me and told me something. He threatened that if I gave up my Clan to him, he won't attack MoonClan. He told me that he wanted me to run far away and never come back." He took a deep breath. "If I don't do that, Dewstar will attack us. I have two moons to decide what to do."

Silverleaf snarled. "We have to defend ourselves!" she hissed, turning to face him. "I will *never* let my kits get into his paws."

Icestar was surprised at how defensive she got. Was this the loving protection of a queen? Silverleaf wouldn't know that feeling—her mother died when she was young, after all. But a new sense of protectiveness burned in her eyes.

"If it comes to that, I know I will protect our kits with all my life. I'd rather have MoonClan fight this war," Silverleaf went on. "Don't you feel the same?"

He realized that she was right. "I do feel that way, Silverleaf," Icestar told her. "But what if we lose the battle and our friends die? What if something bad happens to our kits?"

"Nothing will happen." She raised her chin. "I don't want this battle to be our kit's earliest memories, but I more so don't want them having a bad life under the rule of DarkClan. We've been in this forest all our lives, so I know that I will not easily give it up."

"I will have to talk to our Clanmates soon," he murmured. "I don't know when but this decision can't only be up to me."

"I am sticking strong to my decision," Silverleaf said, "and I'm sure everyone else will feel the same."

Maybe that's what I should do . . . Maybe we should defend our Clan,

Icestar thought.

Suddenly, Stripeeyes broke into a coughing fit, interrupting Icestar and Silverleaf's conversation. The elder's eyes opened wide, and fear shone in them. "S-Sweetheart," choked the old tom. "Help! I can't breathe."

Immediately, Icestar burst from his spot. His heart was at a sudden panic, but he didn't hesitate to race over to him. He quickly scanned over Stripeeye's face, before whirling around. "Stay with Stripeeyes," Icestar ordered Silverleaf.

She nodded, and emerged right by his side. "Shh, everything's going to be fine," Silverleaf whispered to him. "It's okay to relax."

Stripeeye's coughing eased a little bit, and Icestar returned with two poppy seeds in his paw. "Take this," Icestar urged. "Sweetheart says it will calm you down."

The elder nodded, and swallowed both seeds. His breathing seemed to ease as Silverleaf began to massage his chest with her forepaws. "I'll be right back," Icestar mewed to Silverleaf. "He needs water."

"Why not just take the snow and put it into his mouth?" Silverleaf suggested. "It's water when it melts. Maybe it'll also cool down his throat. He feels a little hot . . ."

"I'm fine now!" snapped Stripeeyes, with a cough following afterwords.

"You wouldn't want to get in a coughing fit like that again," Silverleaf snarled. "Stop thinking about pride and let us help you for once! Isn't your health what is more important?"

"That may be so, but you shouldn't waste herbs on me." Stripeeyes stood up weakly. "It looks like Blackpaw is developing whitecough. The youngsters should be treated before the elders."

Icestar shook his head. "I am not trying to put you in a weak position, Stripeeyes, but it's far better to let apprentices heal without depending solely on herbs. They are strong and can adapt to sickness and injuries better. Elders don't have those abilities

anymore, so therefore you must be treated first." He paused. "Besides, *you're* the one who's *actually* sick, not Blackpaw."

At least not yet.

Stripeeyes silenced, but he was glaring at his leader. Icestar trudged out of the medicine den and out to the open, scooping up a pawful of snow. After doing so, he went back into the medicine den. "Here, Stripeeyes. Drink up."

Stripeeyes bent down and lapped up the snow, his fur bristling at how cold it was. Or perhaps his fur was bristling because Icestar was helping him . . . Annoyance and frustration filled into Icestar. The elder had no right to be angry just because he needed help! He didn't know how Sweetheart could deal with this kind of thing nearly every day.

* * *

Sweetheart returned to camp with enough catmint by the time the sun was on the tree-tips. Stripeeyes managed just fine until the medicine cat arrived, and Icestar was glad that he got off her duties. Even though he just knew a few useful herbs, he was never properly trained and was relieved to find that no cat other than Stripeeyes had needed help. Silverleaf herself even said she was feeling better by the end of the day.

Currently, Icestar was on his den, gazing up at the sun as it sunk down in the horizon. He kept his eyes on the red and orange that blazed upon white snow in the forest. In the DarkClan camp, sunsets like this couldn't even be seen with the trees and branches that covered the sky. He felt bad for those cats; perhaps they weren't really evil, maybe just misguided. He remembered their first leader, Darkstar, and the last life of light she provided him in his nine-lives ceremony. She looked like she had done things she regretted, and it must of been her fault that DarkClan cats were misguided.

Maybe with proper guidance they wouldn't have turned out so badly, thought Icestar.

He sat on his den until the moon had risen into the sky—a small white crescent that illuminated the forest. There was still some time before Silverpelt would appear in the sky, so the camp was mostly dark. The majority of his Clanmates were awake, probably refusing to go to sleep since Icestar didn't go to sleep, and in the darkness he could easily hear all of their soft voices.

The MoonClan leader went on thinking of everything—from his unborn kits, to DarkClan, to the prophecy, and finally, Dewstar's threat. Ashtail and Silverleaf both chose fighting the battle over surrendering to save their own lives, but he was still indecisive himself. DarkClan was a big and strong Clan, and it had many more cats than Icestar's own Clan. Their numbers easily overwhelmed him, and he was afraid of risking the lives of his dear friends.

"Icestar," Flameheart called from the bottom of his den. Icestar looked down to see the rusty orange tom right besides Sharpfang. *Perhaps I should ask them what they want to do*? Icestar thought. Maybe he needed a few more answers from my Clanmates. *Then, I might know what to do*.

"I'm coming down," Icestar replied, carefully descending off of the tall rock. When he got to a stone that was close enough to the ground, he leaped and landed on the cold snow of the earth, landing steadily on his paws. "Is there anything wrong?"

Flameheart shook his head and meowed, "Nothing wrong with us." Just as he said that, Shadowheart emerged right beside Flameheart, his black pelt barely visible against the night sky.

"But," Sharpfang said, "we have been talking with Ashtail."

"What has Ashtail told you?" Icestar urged, wanting to get into the topic of Dewstar's threat. He was eager and scared to see what his Clanmates would think.

"He told us of what Dewstar has in plan," meowed Sharpfang. "That we will either attack, or live under his rule . . ."

Icestar's eyes widened. *They already know?*

"He only talked to us three," Shadowheart murmured, keeping his voice low. "Perhaps he wanted to speak with me because my sister lives in DarkClan, and to Flameheart because that is his birth Clan."

"Wh-what do you both think about this . . . ?" Icestar asked, his heart pounding. For some reason, it made him even more scared.

Shadowheart was the first to step up. "I want to fight," he declared. "Even though I have a sister there, I must put my Clan first."

Flameheart nodded with agreement. "And I *never* want to join DarkClan again. My days there are long over, so I want to fight as well."

Icestar was surprised. Every cat that he asked so far wanted to fight. *These are true warriors*, he told himself. *Cats who will not abandon their Clan is what makes a strong heart*. He turned to Sharpfang, wondering what the gray tom will say.

"I . . . want to fight as well," Sharpfang said. "I'm not at all eager risking the lives of my kits, but I will fight to the bitter end to keep them safe from harm. Whatever decision I make, Sagepelt stands strong by me, and so do my kits."

Icestar nodded and glanced up at the sky, where the stars slowly started to emerge by the crescent moon. "I think I know what to do now," he said, his voice low. The leader's heart swelled as he thought of how much his Clanmates cared for each other. *I can never let this friendship between us all die. Everyone agrees so too*. He padded away from the three cats, and climbed back on the Moonrock. He gazed down at his Clan, his scars from past battles glinting at the light of the moon's touch.

"Cats of MoonClan, gather around to hear what I must say!" he called.

In no time, cats began crawling out of the warrior's den, all murmuring in confusion. Amberpaw, Blackpaw and Goldenpaw all padded out of the apprentice den, side-by-side, while the elders, excluding Stripeeyes, clambered into the clearing. Silverleaf sat with Sagepelt and her kits by the nursery with her brother,

Squirreltail and his mate, Goldsun. Crowflight took a spot besides Shadowheart, Sharpfang and Stonetooth, and he could also make out Swiftbreeze and Nightrose sitting by each other near the entrance of the camp, coming in from their guard duties. Fireshade and Rainwhisker met with Ashtail and sat near the front of the clearing. The rest of the cats sat by the back, keeping close to the warm warrior's den.

Icestar stared down at his Clan with a deep feeling touching his heart. These were his friends and family, and he knew that he could not give that up. Thanks to Ashtail, Silverleaf, Shadowheart, Sharpfang and Flameheart, he realized this.

Then, he began to speak. "I've been thinking of something deeply for a day now," he said. "Not long ago, Dewstar spoke to me. He gave our Clan options . . . that we either go under his rule and surrender so we don't have to right, or we refuse and fight this battle. He gave me two moons to give him an answer." He stopped talking, and looked down to everyone, gaze sweeping around the clearing. "I have concluded my decision with the help of some cats: we are going into war."

Author's Note #3

Hey guys. School is ending pretty soon, and the reason why I have been on a delay for publishing chapters (in *all* my books) is because finals are all day every week for **all** the subjects this year.

I really don't want to fail, so lately I've been studying a lot. I'm so happy - my scores are turning out super excellent. Anyways, I promise that when school ends I am going to update like crazy. The huge surprise ending for Icetail's Enemy is coming soon so y'all better prepare yourselves! We're going on one emotional rollercoaster.

~~L.TC

Chapter Fifty Five

Edited ✔

Okay everyone, I am sorry for the long wait in this new update. But I have great news to share — school is officially out and I am up and at 'em again! I've ended *all* my test scores with something higher than 85% (I got a 96 on my English, specifically), which is AWESOME, and I've been improving my writing in secret for this past month. Well anyways, since you guys have had a long wait, I'm going to try to update at least two (if fortunate, more) chapters before July starts. Icetail's Enemy will be complete very shortly, and then I will begin the sequel to the book. Thank y'all for sticking to this book for so long! To show my thanks, I'll write my best for these last few chapters ^o^

Murmurs rippled throughout the Clan as soon as Icestar finished his announcements. Deep down, he was hoping he made the right decision . . . because if not, the fate and blood of all of his Clanmates will be in his paws. They were his responsibility, after all. He kept a watchful eye on all of his friends, wondering what they were thinking about it. Finally, he met Silverleaf's gaze. Her light blue eyes shone of approval.

Icestar felt a bit relieved.

Ashtail stood up from his spot. "I'm with Icestar!" he called, his voice loud enough for everyone to hear.

"Me too," Swiftbreeze yowled at an instant.

Sagepelt brought her kits closer to her, and her chin rose high. "I will fight too!" she declared.

Cats in the crowd exchanged glances. Sharpfang stood up too. "I will support you, Icestar," called the senior warrior. "DarkClan will not beat us!"

Amberpaw and Blackpaw were fidgeting with eagerness, and Goldenpaw was shrinking by her brother's side, obviously scared. "MoonClan! MoonClan!" chanted the apprentices, excluding Goldenpaw, and in a moment, the whole Clan began to chant along with them. "MoonClan! MoonClan! MoonClan!"

A whole weight lifted off of Icestar's shoulders. From the Moonrock, he could see that Stripeeyes was in the elder's den with a disapproving look on his face. Goldenpaw trembled in her spot. *Some cats don't approve,* he thought sadly. *But we will fight this battle; most of the Clan wants to, and so do I.* He remembered Silverleaf's words about their kits. Her desire to protect them buried deep in his heart.

When the chanting died down, Icestar began to speak again. "In a moon at our next gathering, I will ask CloudClan for their assistance if we need it," he said. "I don't like being in anyone's debts, but for the sake of our own Clan, we have to beat DarkClan."

Ashtail looked up at Icestar. "May I have permission to speak?" asked his deputy.

Icestar nodded. "You may. Come here so that everyone can hear you."

Ashtail began to make his way up the Moonrock, climbing gracefully up the steep stones. When he had taken his place besides Icestar, he cleared his throat and raised his voice high. "We will need to form more training patrols," he said, glancing around. "Our apprentices must know the advanced skills of a warrior by two moons, and we have to secure our camp as much as we possibly can. Even our kits must learn to defend themselves."

Ashtail looked over to the nursery, glancing at Shadekit and Berrykit. Eagerness lit up in the both of their eyes, and Sagepelt seemed to become uncomfortable with the idea by the look on her face.

Icestar heard the knowledge of the seasoned warrior's voice. He was right. *Ashtail had fought in a real war before,* thought the leader. *Most of the senior warriors had. We will need their guidance in every step of*

this.

"We will also need a battle strategy," Ashtail went on. "When the day comes, we will have to have an ambush ready, and our whole territory grounds secured."

"I'll defend our camp and help the other elders regain their strength," Mousetail said. "I haven't been an elder myself for *too* long, so my warrior skills are still fresh. Stripeeyes needs to re-learn battle moves since his vision is not that great, so I will teach him and the others."

Stripeeyes snarled. "I can fight well, thank you very much!"

Icestar ignored the rude elder and dipped his head to Mousetail. "Thank you. I'm sure you will be successful."

Nightrose stood taller. "I'll take care of securing the camp," she said. "I'll make it that it'll be easy to exit, but hard to enter."

"I'll help Nightrose," Fireshade called.

"As will I," Thrushclaw called. "I may be an elder, but I am sure that I will be defending our camp as well."

Icestar nodded with approval. His Clanmates were already forming preparations, even though he had just told everyone of his plans. He was glad that every cat was taking this seriously. "And," he meowed, "Sagepelt will be in charge of taking care of the nursery."

"I can defend it too, just as well as Sagepelt will," Silverleaf called, her voice a little snappy.

"I'm asking Sagepelt because she's not expecting kits," Icestar said back in the same tone of voice.

The queen silenced, though her expression gleamed with defiance. He tried to ignore it; of course she'd get mad at him for saying that. She'll just have to get over it until the kits were born.

"And starting tomorrow, we will begin our training," Icestar continued, forcing himself to look away from his mate. "In two

moons, we *have* to be ready. Our Clan is small in comparison to DarkClan, but they are not unbeatable."

Goldenpaw was still shivering. "I-I don't want to fight," she whimpered, loud enough for Icestar to hear.

Nightrose, her mother, ran up by her, pressing her pelt to her daughter's to comfort her. Icestar gave Goldenpaw a stern look and began to speak. "It's understandable that fighting in a war at such a young age is tough, but you must. You will have to be brave, like Amberpaw and Blackpaw."

"Icestar, I'll talk to her," Nightrose said.

"No!" Goldenpaw meowed, snapping away from her mother. "Just leave me alone." She clambered into her nest in the apprentice den, and Icestar took a deep breath.

"Everyone is dismissed," he announced. "We have a long day tomorrow, so I suggest that everyone should rest up."

For a moment, cats were speaking softly to each other, but everyone began to disperse in their dens. Nightrose reluctantly returned to her guard post outside the camp, although she looked back to the apprentice's den at her upset daughter. Blackpaw went after Goldenpaw, his tired eyes concerned. Every other warrior, including the elders, went back to their dens, and Sweetheart was giving Icestar a look as if she wanted to talk.

Ashtail turned his gaze over to Icestar as well. "You did the right thing," mewed his deputy, his voice low. "Goldenpaw will come around eventually."

"I hope so," Icestar murmured.

"I must go to sleep now. We all have a long day tomorrow, and I will have to wake up early to assign patrols," Ashtail explained.

"Go ahead, and goodnight." He gave his deputy a friendly look before Ashtail climbed down the stones of the Moonrock with caution. The cold snow almost had made him slip, but he successfully leaped onto the ground. Icestar followed his deputy,

with his tail out evenly to balance himself down on the rocks.

Ashtail departed ways when he went to make his way to the warriors den, and Icestar fell into the safety of the leader's den inside the Moonrock. He was sleepy, and his paws were heavy as he stepped inside. Relieved, he lied down on his nest, becoming more and more exhausted.

Moments passed until Icestar finally went to sleep.

* * *

Icestar stalked a mouse in the undergrowth, his tail carefully above the ground and his eyes straight on the small brown creature. His mouth watered from hunger, and he took a step closer. With a leap, he pounced onto the mouse, killing it successfully with a blow to the neck.

"Yes!" the leader said triumphantly, keeping his voice low in case there was anymore prey around. He buried his mouse under a bush along with the squirrel he managed to kill, and went off back into the cover of the undergrowth and dead trees. He could already taste the scent of a thrush. He wondered what a bird would be doing here so far into leaf-bare. Most birds usually left during leaf-fall to get away from the cold.

Icestar watched as he saw his apprentice skillfully stalk it on the sensitive snow. She waited for a moment before leaping at it, but unfortunately she landed just a whisker away from it, and it had noticed her and began to flap its wings frantically, though it did not take off.

Surprised, Icestar watched and realized that the bird's wing was at a weird angle, clearly broken. Amberpaw scrambled up and noticed it too, her eyes widening. She did not move from her spot. *What is she doing*? thought Icestar. *She should be catching it*!

He was about to leap at the bird himself, until his apprentice realized what she was doing. She ran for the bird before it got too far, and pinned down the wing that wasn't broken. "Everything will be okay," Icestar heard her whisper to the suffering creature, before

giving it a quick killing bite. She stared at its broken wing right after it was dead.

Icestar padded out of the undergrowth, revealing his spot as soon as she set it to the ground. "Well done, Amberpaw," he praised her. "I thought you weren't going to go for the kill."

"You were watching?" she asked.

"The whole thing," Icestat replied, bending down to give his apprentice an encouraging and comforting lick behind her ear. "It's okay that the bird was suffering, you just put it out of its misery. It will do good to the Clan by feeding us."

Amberpaw nodded. "I know. The very thought made me kill it. I just . . . felt bad for it. Fresh-kill are alive like us, so I just couldn't imagine what it went through."

"We need to have all of our strength for when the day of the battle comes," he reminded her. "Prey is what gives us strength, so I am proud of you."

Amberpaw beamed, and picked up her thrush just as a rustle sounded in the dead bush branches behind him. He turned swiftly to see Blackpaw's tall figure squeezed through the small opening uncomfortably before meeting with Amberpaw and Icestar.

"I caught something too," he boasted as soon as he emerged into the clearing, holding up a plump vole in pride. "Sagepelt's kits will *love* this. They eat fresh-kill now, right?"

Icestar nodded. "That's a great vole, and I believe so." He remembered Sharpfang watching his kits with pride as they ate their first bites of prey. Sagepelt's milk was running out, so she had no choice but to give them a new option of fresh-kill, which they were very excited about. "By the way, have you see Goldenpaw anywhere? I think it is time we get going back to camp."

"I passed by her a while ago," Blackpaw said, turning to look over his back. "I last saw her over there." The black-furred apprentice was pointing with his tail to a shallow scoop in the ground that was

filled with snow. Small branches stuck out of the snow, and paw-prints covered the ground. They were faint, as he noticed that the snow had fallen slightly inside the deep, small prints.

"*I* haven't seen her since we all departed from one another," Amberpaw put in.

Icestar padded over to where Blackpaw had pointed, but his ears raised in alarm when he realized that the scent was faint. "She *hasn't* been here. She left a while ago, Blackpaw," Icestar told him.

"Goldenpaw told me she'd meet us back here," replied Blackpaw.

Amberpaw tilted her head. "Maybe Goldenpaw had to make dirt?" she suggested.

"No cat makes dirt for that long," Blackpaw snapped in reply.

"Maybe she found something good to hunt, and chased it away. She might be coming back right now," Amberpaw went on. Her eyes were hopeful.

Icestar shook his head. "No. This scent is too faint for that. How long ago did you last see her here, Blackpaw?"

"Since the birds stopped singing. We passed by each other; the sun was barely above the trees."

"Perhaps she went ahead to camp . . ." Icestar murmured. "We must go and see."

"But what if she is in the forest?" Amberpaw said with a fearful tone. "She could be anywhere!"

"I'm sure she went to camp," Icestar comforted. "Hopefully she did."

* * *

By the time Icestar reached the camp, he had three pieces of prey in his mouth even though he had originally caught a mouse and a squirrel. Right near the camp, a second mouse had ran right under his paws, and he managed to swiftly kill it by accidentally stepping

on it. Blackpaw called it luck, and Amberpaw was wildly impressed when she saw it happen. He dropped the two mice and the squirrel on the fresh-kill pile, and Amberpaw dropped off her thrush. Blackpaw, having caught a vole and a starling, left his prey there and bounded off to Flameheart near the warrior's den.

Icestar left his spot, following Amberpaw. He ended up by the apprentice's den. "Goldenpaw, are you here?" called Amberpaw. She looked inside the den, and so did Icestar, but it was empty. "Goldenpaw . . .?"

"She must be with some cat," Icestar suggested. "Let's keep looking."

"She's nowhere!" Amberpaw murmured, clawing the ground. "Not in the forest, not in camp!"

At an instant, both Blackpaw and Flameheart raced by Icestar. The leader was startled for a heartbeat at the suddenness of the two toms, but he straightened his back. "Yes?" he asked them.

Flameheart was the one to speak. "Goldenpaw hasn't been here ever since she left with you to go on the hunting patrol," he said, his eyes worried. "She's clearly lost somewhere in the forest." He gestured with his nose to Fireshade and Nightrose, who were talking side-by-side with one another, their gazes scanning the camp worriedly. Nightrose turned and looked at Icestar right in the eyes.

His pelt struck with fear. *She suspects that Goldenpaw is gone!* he thought with worry. Nightrose got up from her spot, and padded over to Icestar, Flameheart and the apprentices. "Icestar," she meowed, her tone a tad sharp, "where is my daughter?"

"Nightrose, Goldenpaw's missing!" Amberpaw blurted out. Nightrose's eyes widened. "We searched and we searched but we—"

"Amberpaw!" Icestar scolded.

"Is this true?" asked Nightrose. The black she-cat's pelt was bristling. Fireshade, obviously sensing the tone of the conversation, padded up to join them as well. He looked concerned.

Icestar sighed, and nodded. "Yes, well, I don't know for sure. She

might still be out hunting, but after looking and waiting for some time, we could not find her. Blackpaw told her where to return when she finished hunting, *and* at a specific time, too." He stopped himself for a moment before reluctantly adding, "We thought—err, *I* thought she came back to camp ahead of us, so we came here."

"But you can't find her," Nightrose said, her voice bitter.

"It's not Icestar's fault!" Amberpaw meowed, standing up to her mentor's defense. "I-I think that she was scared of battle, and she ran away."

Fireshade's eyes angered. "Amberpaw! How dare you have such thoughts about your own sister!"

"It might be true though," Blackpaw put in. "Ever since this morning she looked different. I know it hasn't been long since Icestar made the announcement, but when we woke up . . . I don't know, she was just *different.*"

Nightrose shrunk down. "My poor daughter," whispered the she-cat, and shut her eyes.

Fireshade brushed his pelt to her's in a comforting way. "We have to find her as soon as possible," he demanded. "We can't leave Goldenpaw stranded outside of camp. She could have gotten chased by a fox or a badger, or even captured by—"

"Don't say it," Icestar snapped, before Fireshade said *DarkClan*. He hoped that Dewstar's Clan had nothing to do with it this time. They had enough troubles in the past, and now a war coming up in the future. If something were to happen to the two Clans now that every cat was not ready, destruction upon MoonClan would be for certain, and Icestar would have to give up his home and flee the territory since he refused to give up his friends.

"We must find her," Fireshade went on, casting a glance down at his mate, "before something bad happens to her."

* * *

All through sunhigh, Icestar led the search patrol through the forest.

The sun was going down by now, and he was tired since he had to work his muscles all through the afternoon. His paws stung as the ice cold snow got through his paw pads, and the wind whipped uncomfortably at his face, indicating that another storm was soon to come. Amberpaw wandered ahead, following Nightrose as they looked through all possible spots where Goldenpaw could be hiding. They couldn't even pick up a fresh scent of her, and Icestar felt that he was slowly giving up hope.

Beside him, Fireshade confidently looked around, while Flameheart went off into a close patch of frozen dead grass, trying to pick up a scent from there. Icestar himself was keeping his ears pricked and his eyes alert, closely looking at good places where the apprentice might be hiding. He felt terrible.

If only I were a better leader, Goldenpaw would be more confident, he thought sadly. *She wouldn't be so scared of war, and she wouldn't have ran away*.

He looked down to his paws. Sharpfang padded by his side. "Why do you look so bad?" asked the older tom.

"It's my fault." Icestar gave a deep sigh, his warm breath turning into mist in the frozen air. "I should of never—"

Sharpfang snorted with disgust, cutting Icestar off. "You're *not* a sorry excuse for a leader, and it's *not* your fault Goldenpaw chose run away." He looked at the dead forest trees. "If anything, it was she who decided to run away."

You wouldn't know, Icestar thought bitterly.

"You *will* be a sorry excuse for a leader if you don't find her," went on the senior warrior. "Nightrose is devastated enough."

"I know that!" Icestar snapped. "I can imagine."

A few more moments of silence passed by, before a loud voice cut through the air.

"Goldenpaw!" yowled Amberpaw, her voice projecting through the trees of the forest. For a moment, Icestar himself was startled, until

he realized that it was only his apprentice being obnoxious again.

He suddenly became aggravated. She can't go off yowling like that! She'll scare every piece of prey in the forest, or worse, give out their position to an uninvited enemy. "Amberpaw," Icestar snapped, before she could yell like that again. "Keep your voice down!"

Amberpaw whimpered. "But we can't find Goldenpaw *anywhere*!" she exclaimed. Her pelt was bristling with frustration, and her gaze was engulfed with a worried look.

Nightrose padded up to her an pressed her pelt to her daughter's in a comforting manner. "Don't worry," whispered the she-cat. "We'll find your sister no matter what. I won't stop until she's safe and sound back in camp."

"Me neither," Fireshade assured, while Sharpfang gave a nod of agreement. Even though they were trying to comfort her, Amberpaw still looked distressed.

The small apprentice sighed. "Isn't it easier to call out for her?" she asked. "That way, Goldenpaw will hear us and we won't have to go looking everywhere for her."

Flameheart shook his head. "We can't go off doing that. We can risk many things by letting ourselves be known by our surroundings." His voice was low. "There can be a fox somewhere for all we know, and if we drive it towards us, it will be harder to find Goldenpaw. Don't you think?"

Amberpaw looked down to her paws. "Yeah, I guess," she mumbled.

Icestar was surprised. *I've never seen her this sad before*, he realized, keeping his eyes fixed on the young she-cat. *She and her sister must be very close.* He sighed. *I hope Goldenpaw turns out to be okay . . .*

"Let's keep searching," Flameheart urged her. Amberpaw nodded and padded on ahead with Nightrose on her tail. Fireshade went off into a different direction, but Flameheart and Sharpfang stood by Icestar's side.

He pricked his ears once more to listen to the forest around him.

The only sound to be heard was his own Clanmates as they exchanged soft murmurs, searching through the bushes and the undergrowth for a clue of Goldenpaw's whereabouts. Icestar himself was getting more discouraged and scared, knowing that he was the one to announce the war in the first place.

Up ahead, Fireshade stopped in his tracks. "I . . . I think I scent something!" he gasped. "It's fresher than the other scents we picked up." Eagerly, he turned to Icestar. "There might even be a trail!"

"A trail?" Sharpfang asked with curiosity.

Icestar opened his jaws and smelled the spot that Fireshade had caught. It was fresh with Goldenpaw's scent, with faint paw tracks lining the snow on the ground.

Nightrose jumped from her spot, Amberpaw following eagerly. "Let's go!" meowed the she-cat warrior. "She could be in trouble!"

She was about to charge from her spot, until Icestar leaped in front of her. "No, wait Nightrose," he said, standing in her way.

"What do you think you're doing?" she snapped, her eyes blazing with anger. "My daughter is out there all alone, and I have to find her!" Icestar didn't move from his spot, and her eyes darkened. "I respect you, Icestar, but don't make me force you."

Icestar shook his head. "I'll go at it alone." He turned and looked at Amberpaw, Sharpfang, Fireshade and Nightrose in turn. "She ran away because she's scared of war, and I think I'm the only one who can talk to her." *It's my fault she got upset anyways,* he thought.

"That's no reason! She's still my daughter," Nightrose objected, "and I'm going!"

Icestar's fur bristled. "This is something I have to do. She clearly went this way, so I'll go get her back myself. Too many cats once out of camp is dangerous." He turned his stern gaze on Amberpaw. "And you're not following me."

"I-I wasn't even planning to!" she gasped. Icestar could clearly tell that it was a lie.

He looked at Fireshade, wondering what the tom had in mind. "I won't go against you," he decided. "Leader's word is law, after all."

"If it's something you have to do, I won't follow you either," Sharpfang agreed, while Flameheart nodded as well. "I'll lead everyone back to camp by dusk if we don't meet up by then. We will keep searching."

Icestar nodded of approval. "Hopefully she is not far," he told them, before picking up the scent-trail that Fireshade had found. He knew that Goldenpaw's parents and sister wanted to go with him to find her, but he knew that her being away was his fault, and he wanted to make up for it in the best way he could. He hoped that she was okay. "I'll meet you back in camp," he said to the search party, before following the trail as carefully as he could.

A bad feeling clung to his chest, even though his hopes were slowly rising once more. *Oh Goldenpaw, please tell me you're okay*, he thought as he followed Goldenpaw's fresh scent.

Chapter Fifty Six

Edited ✔

Following the trail was easy for Icestar the farther he got along.

He kept on the tracks, wondering where Goldenpaw was off to, when he realized that it lead off of MoonClan's territory. *Why would she leave?* he thought with worry. *Is she so scared that she just abandoned us?* He hoped it was not true—her mother would be devastated, and Amberpaw might not be the same again. Icestar knew what it was like to lose a sibling.

He continued to follow the trail carefully, making sure that he did not get it mistaken since he knew that his nose didn't work like it used to. The wind was getting stronger and stronger, he had to walk at a slower pace to keep on track. It wasn't so easy, though. Soon, Goldenpaw's scent was becoming harder to smell, and it started to become dangerous. Loose branches from the naked trees began to sway, indicating that they'd fall soon. Somewhere back in the forest, he heard the loud crash of a tree that fell from its roots.

It wasn't safe at all out here at all. He had to hurry, or something wrong could happen.

Suddenly, he heard a loud uneasy creak. Beside him, a tall leafless birch tree tilted to the side, and Icestar's eyes widened. It was going to fall! He burst from his spot, running as fast as he could just in time, before the tree crashed onto the snowy ground with a defeating boom. The impact made Icestar shake, but he continued on anyways, knowing that he could not turn back now.

Goldenpaw could be close!

Soon, he realized that the scent trail was leading to the cave of the Night Flower, the place where Icestar went to receive his nine lives. *What was Goldenpaw doing over there*? he wondered. Only leaders and medicine cats visited the Night Flower. He never heard of a

warrior, let alone an apprentice, that had anything to do with it.

Icestar ran from his spot, ignoring the scent trail. He tried to remember the direction of the Night Flower, until the cave entrance was in sight. Quickly, he ran until he was in the cover of the rocks and the warmth from the outside. He sighed a breath of relief and turned to the tunnel that would lead there.

Gulping, he went through it.

Goldenpaw's scent swarmed strongly around him as he progressed farther down. When the space was wide enough, he spun around, knowing that she was here for sure. He followed her scent carefully, trying to ignore the sound of the howling wind behind him from the entrance of the cave. Soon, her scent became so strong that he knew she was close.

"Goldenpaw!" Icestar called, keeping his voice down for precautions. There was no reply, but Icestar felt her warm presence nearby, as well as a fear-scent. "Goldenpaw?" he called again, getting a little louder.

He spotted a lump of fur in the darkness, breathing weakly.

Alarmed, he ran up to her. "Goldenpaw!"

Her eyes opened. "I-Icestar?" she whispered. "What are you doing here . . .?"

He shook his head, pressing his warm body against her cold one. "What are *you* doing here, Goldenpaw? I just followed you." He looked around. "This is no place for a warrior apprentice."

"I had to talk to StarClan," she murmured, her claws digging in the ground. "They are so confusing . . . I don't understand what to do anymore." He listened to her, surprised. "I had a dream last night. There were cats fighting everywhere, blood pooling the ground from the dead and injured."

"Do you know who were fighting?" Icestar urged her.

She nodded. "DarkClan, MoonClan and . . . CloudClan."

Icestar's pelt bristled with alarm. "Why was CloudClan in the battle?" he murmured to himself. *Unless . . . they are meant to help us!* he thought. *Or they are meant to destroy us along with DarkClan.* He shut his eyes tightly. "Are you hungry?" he asked to Goldenpaw, trying to change the topic.

"I can't eat!" wailed the apprentice, forcing herself to stand up. "I must speak to StarClan before the battle. I have to know what to do!"

"Don't worry, you will know when the time is right," he said reassuringly. He slowly rested Goldenpaw on the ground once more. "Sleep. And in the morning, you'll have something good to eat."

Goldenpaw shut her eyes. "But I have to talk to StarClan—"

"Sleep," he said again, his voice becoming softer.

In enough time, her eyes closed, and her breathing relaxed, indicating that she was asleep. Icestar sighed with relief, knowing that she'd be okay now. He hoped that the storm would pass by dawn, so they can set out to MoonClan early. He didn't want to worry any cat, after all.

He got up, hoping that there was a mouse or two somewhere in the caves. He should have prey ready for Goldenpaw when she woke up, so she'd be strong enough to travel. Icestar had to be strong himself, for his muscles and bones were frozen and tired, and his belly was growling madly.

He scented the air, getting hungrier by the second. Shortly, he scented what he wanted. He could taste the smell of a mouse. Its squeaks were barely heard, but loud enough to make out in the echo of the closed walls. He began to follow its scent until it got stronger and the squeaking became louder. Finally, he turned up on a small hole in the rocky wall, large enough so he could fit his paw inside.

Icestar crouched down, knowing that the mice were hiding inside. He stuck his paw in, and swiped with claws outstretched. His claws met with one of the mice, and he pulled it out, killing it swiftly

before it escaped. He knew that there were more, though. He stuck his paw in again, and smashed one of them against the wall, holding in place while it struggled wildly. He stuck his claws in its neck, and when he felt it was limp, he pulled it out and put it beside the one he killed before. He looked inside. Two more were left. Simultaneously, his claws swiped against the belly of one and the neck of the other, and he pulled them out, satisfied with the catches. One for him, one for Goldenpaw, and two more for the Clan.

Icestar made his way back to her, and cuddled up beside her, keeping the mice close to protect his prey. He fell asleep moments after, his eyes heavy and his mind whirling, eager to rest.

By the time Icestar woke up again, Goldenpaw was still asleep. By the sound of it, the storm must have calmed down a little. He was relieved. He nudged Goldenpaw until her eyes opened, and told her, "Eat up, Goldenpaw. We're going back home."

The apprentice yawned, sitting up. "Do I smell mice?"

Icestar pushed one of the bodies towards her. "They might not be so warm, but they are enough to fill you up." He grabbed himself one, and began munching on it. "I caught four just after you fell asleep."

"It's good," she sighed, eating her own share.

Icestar nodded, and a thought came to mind. He wondered if she had another dream, or if she found an answer like she wanted. Despite his curiosity, he decided not to bring it up just in case he put the idea in her head that they could still visit the Night Flower. Another disturbing thought crossed his mind: why had Goldenpaw been the one to receive the dream? What is StarClan thinking, putting this into her mind?

When they finished eating, they hid the bones and scraps behind a rock, and Icestar picked up the two limp bodies in his teeth as he led the way out. Goldenpaw was silent, but he led anyways, keeping a fast pace. He wanted to get back to MoonClan as quickly as possible, even though he spent the night away from them. He knew

how worried his Clanmates and friends must be, and he didn't want to cause them the trouble of searching for him and Goldenpaw.

When they had reached the forest, the sun was already starting to climb high since the trip to the Night Flower was a long one.

The scenery felt completely changed. Shock swelled into his body as he glanced at his surroundings. There was snow everywhere, thicker than anything he had seen before. Several trees lay limp on the ground, with roots sticking out from the dirt and into the air, towering over him. Worst of all, the forest was deadly silent.

He padded on, noticing how close Goldenpaw was sticking to him. He could pick up a fear scent from her. "What happened?" she whispered, her eyes wide as she looked around the trees and the undergrowth.

"Another storm happened," he responded, giving a sigh. "They keep on coming. It began to brew as soon as we were searching for you."

"Oh no!" gasped Goldenpaw. "Did anyone get hurt? I shouldn't have ran away like that . . ."

"I doubt anyone got hurt," Icestar responded, hoping that he was right.

Goldenpaw sighed with relief. The two of them kept on walking, their senses alert to the dangers of the forest. Icestar led her through the trees, making sure she was sticking close to him. The mouse in his jaws were becoming uncomfortable to carry, but he went on anyways. After some time, they crossed up on a hill of snow.

Icestar began to climb down it first, but he tumbled inside the light, thick snow as soon as he set paw on it. He yelped with surprise, and the snow buried on top of him as he fell in. The leader immediately felt cold, and he gasped for air, but the snow immediately choked down his throat. The frost burned his eyes, and his fur felt uncomfortably wet.

"Icestar!" yowled Goldenpaw. She stuck her paws into the snow,

digging as quick as she could. Icestar struggled, flailing his forepaws until he felt the cold air. Goldenpaw grabbed Icestar's scruff, attempting to pull him out, but he was too heavy. He managed to poke his head through, and gasped for air after he spit out the two mice, coughing out water and shaking the snow off his head. "A-are you okay?" Goldenpaw whimpered.

"I'm fine—just cold," he managed. His pelt was shivering from the wet snow that quickly melted to the touch of his fur. "I need to get out of here before I freeze to death," he muttered, more to himself than to Goldenpaw.

"How do I help you?" she asked him. "The snow is to deep. I can fall in too if I try to set my paws there." She looked worriedly down to him, her pelt shaking even though Icestar was the cold one.

He looked around, and then spotted a dead tree. He had an idea. "Go get that branch sticking out of the dead tree over there," he meowed, pointing his nose in the direction he was looking. "Then, stick it down here and pull as hard as you can. It'll help me climb the snow."

"That's brilliant!" exclaimed Goldenpaw. "Hold on, I'll be right back." The MoonClan apprentice raced off, and Icestar shifted uncomfortably. He tried to paw his paw out while she was gone, but it was no use. If he tried anything stupid, the snow would come tumbling back down. He would get suffocated by the freezing snow once more, and his pelt will become even more damp. Icestar definitely did not want that.

After a couple more moments, Goldenpaw returned with the dead branch in her jaws. Icestar swore he couldn't feel his tail-tip by now, and was eager to make his escape from the cold, harsh snow. The golden-furred apprentice lowered the dead branch down to him, and he grabbed it with his jaws, giving it a tug so that Goldenpaw could know he was here. She pulled as hard as she could, and Icestar forced his muscles to pull through himself. He pawed at the snow once more, trying to climb his way out since he had support now. His shoulders and neck strained, but he kept on pushing himself.

Goldenpaw grunted with effort as she tried to get him out, but Icestar could feel her slowly sliding closer to the deep pit of snow. He was close—he had to hurry before the both of them fell in at the same time!

"Hurry, Icestar!" Goldenpaw gasped. "I don't think I can hold it for much longer," she managed to say through the branch that was in her mouth.

Icestar, daring not to respond in case he'd fall again, found a solid ground. It must be a rock, buried under the snow! He pulled himself closer while still holding onto the branch at the same time, and put one of his paws on its cold, frost-bitten surface. Then, as quick as he could, he leaped just before Goldenpaw had reached her limit, grappling his paws to hard surface, struggling to climb the rest of the way up.

Goldenpaw collapsed to the ground, her shoulders shaking with exhaustion. "That was a lot of work—you're sure heavy, Icestar!"

"I'd appreciate it if I could get some help here," he grunted from his spot. His claws dug into the earth just underneath the snow. "I can't climb up from here! There's ice all underneath and I'd just slip on it."

"Oh right! I'm so sorry," she gasped, rushing towards him.

"Hurry, I'm falling!" Icestar exclaimed, feeling his forepaws loosen up. A sharp feeling entered Icestar's leg as Goldenpaw sunk her teeth into Icestar's scruff. As she tried her best to pull him out, Icestar struggled to climb even more until finally he got onto solid, safe ground. He gasped as soon as he made it. His back leg was getting no better. The sharp sting worsened, and he hissed with pain.

Goldenpaw seemed to realize it, too. "What's wrong, Icestar? Are you frostbitten?"

His claws scrunched the ground. "I think so, but don't worry. It'll pass in a few moments. Thanks for helping me, by the way. I couldn't have done it without you." He gave her his best purr.

Pride shone on her face. "It would have been bad if you froze to death nine times," she remarked.

"Yeah, it would've," he murmured his agreement. "We better hurry to camp, but in a different direction. I'm sure everyone's worried, and I don't want *that* to happen again." He gave his frostbite a quick lick, wincing with pain, but he forced himself to ignore it. After all, it wouldn't linger as soon as he got a chance to warm up.

He began to lead Goldenpaw down the forest, padding in a different direction so that he wouldn't fall again, and this time, with more caution. They passed up a slope, and weaved around a tight set of trees before Icestar began to scent something. He turned to Goldenpaw, wondering if she scented it as well, and he could tell that she did.

"Do I smell Fireshade?" she murmured, hope glimmering in her eyes. "And Nightrose, too! Dear StarClan, I worried them, didn't I?"

"We were all worried for you, Amberpaw the most," Icestar told her gently.

She looked down to her paws, guilt gleaming in her eyes. "I shouldn't have tried to go to the Night Flower. I don't know the answer to my dream yet . . . but a cat did speak to me. I'm sorry I didn't tell you this earlier."

He looked down, interested. "What did this cat look like?"

"Oh, she was beautiful. A light gray she-cat with blue eyes," Goldenpaw told him. "She looked a lot like Dewstar . . ."

Icestar's heart pounded in his chest. "Featherbreeze," he murmured to himself. It seemed that Goldenpaw heard, though, because she pricked her ears with interest. "Oh, sorry. That was Featherbreeze—my mother." His voice trailed off as he sunk into his own thoughts. Why had she visited Goldenpaw?

"Your mother was beautiful," Goldenpaw said, not sensing Icestar's longing. "Well, she visited me last night, and she just told me that things'll be alright for me." She sighed. "If Featherbreeze hadn't told

me that, I might have still been hunting for the Night Flower. I was so hungry for answers, that . . ."

"It's okay. Every cat will understand," he said firmly. "Don't feel guilty."

"Alright," she finally meowed.

"Oh, and Goldenpaw? Try and keep quiet about your dreams. I might talk to Sweetheart, your parents, and Ashtail about it, but don't try and give Amberpaw any funny ideas," he ordered.

"I won't," she promised.

Icestar nodded. "Good." He began to follow the scent of his Clanmates now that they have finished talking, and Goldenpaw began to follow him, her eyes still looking down and her paws trembling. She reminded Icestar of himself when he was an apprentice. He always wanted answers to the strange dreams that he had, and even went to the extreme for it.

After a few more minutes, things got quiet between them. Icestar was trying to focus on the scent of the search patrol, and Goldenpaw was silent the whole trip. He changed course from going to the camp and began walking into the direction of StreamClan. He was glad they didn't choose to go to DarkClan's borders.

More minutes passed as Icestar followed the scent, and it started to become stronger and stronger. He was more careful than before, because there was more snow closer to the StreamClan border than the rest of the territory. With caution, he padded through the cold snow, his frostbite still stinging. He felt proud of himself for managing to ignore it for so long, even though it hurt so much.

Finally, Icestar heard a voice. He stopped in his tracks, causing Goldenpaw to crash into him.

"Ashtail!" the voice called. It was the voice of a she-cat, Silverleaf. Icestar's fur bristled. What was she doing out of the nursery, especially in *this* weather? "I scent them!" she gasped.

"Where?" Ashtail ordered.

Icestar ran from his own spot, and Goldenpaw kept close behind. Finally, he stumbled into a small clearing. All around, cats from his Clan was gathered; Silverleaf, Ashtail, Amberpaw, Dawnstripe, Blackpaw, Fireshade and Nightrose. He was surprised to see them all here, sitting close together.

Every cat looked surprised, and Amberpaw rushed up to them, her eyes clouding with relief. "Goldenpaw!" she cried. "You're back!" She crashed into her sister, nuzzling her.

"I-it wasn't like I was missing . . ." she murmured, a little embarrassed. Despite this, she nuzzled Amberpaw back. Blackpaw went to join them, as well as Nightrose, who began to bombard her with questioning.

Icestar left his spot to let them have their moment, and turned face-to-face with Fireshade. "It turns out that she wasn't running out of fear," he meowed to Goldenpaw's father. "Just for answers."

Relief filtered into Fireshade's eyes. "I'm glad, then," he said with a sigh. "She's almost a warrior, and I always wanted her to be brave." He paused, then looked up into Icestar's eyes. "What answers was she searching for . . .?"

"I will explain everything back in camp," he murmured, his voice low. "Along with Ashtail and Sweetheart. For now, we must start our trip back."

"Alright," Fireshade agreed. "I'll go greet her now." He left his spot, and padded over to his daughter, a purr escaping his throat.

Now that that is done, Icestar thought, *time to talk to Silverleaf*. He went over to his mate, brushing past Ashtail and Dawnstripe who were quietly talking together in quiet tones. He overheard something about Swiftbreeze, but decided to ignore it. After all, what he was doing seemed more important.

"What are you doing out of camp?" he asked as soon as he greeted her. "It's dangerous for you."

"It's not like the kits are due any time soon," she replied with a

shrug. "I was worried, is all."

"But still," Icestar insisted, his voice trailing off, "I was okay."

"I wouldn't have known," she replied, shaking her head. "It was too restless just waiting in camp—I had to stretch out my legs in the forest."

He sighed, pressing his muzzle against hers. "At least nobody's hurt."

* * *

Back at camp, everyone seemed relieved at the return of not only Goldenpaw, but also Icestar. He dropped the two mice he caught on the fresh-kill-pile, and Amberpaw was leading Goldenpaw to her nest. "You must be exhausted!" Amberpaw was saying.

"No, I already slept," Goldenpaw replied, trying to break free from the apprentice den.

Dawnstripe, though, came just in time before Amberpaw could protest. "I'm sure she's feeling all rested up. How about a hunt, Goldenpaw?" her mentor asked.

"I'd love to!" Goldenpaw exclaimed, rushing past Amberpaw.

Amberpaw ran right to Icestar as soon as Goldenpaw was gone. "Can we *please* go with them, Icestar?" she asked longingly. "Without you here, it was boring! Nothing to do, no cat to train with . . ."

"Yes, that's fine," Icestar replied with a sigh. Amberpaw was too restless and loud—he had to try to teach her to be more quiet and graceful. *Maybe it'll happen when hedgehogs fly*, he told himself in his mind. "Let's go." *And when I get back, I'll speak to everyone. This can't go unnoticed about Goldenpaw,* Icestar decided.

Chapter Fifty Seven

Editing ✔

This book is so close to be done, I'm not even kidding. I'm going to cry when it's completed, really. Thanks for sticking by this journey for ao long! Also, I have nearly forty chapters already edited. Ahh, I'm so glad that the next update was as few as six days instead of two weeks this time. I wrote a little bit each day, and there's a surprise later at the end ;) read to find out!!

a/n this chapter has 666 reads. I couldn't help but notice O_o (12/29/15)

A moon and a half has passed since Goldenpaw had her dream about the battle, and tonight was the gathering. Icestar was sitting by himself in his den, his eyes fixed onto his paws as he thought of the things that could happen tonight. Dewstar could pick a fight, or even attack MoonClan's camp while he's gone . . . no cat was safe anymore, no matter where they were.

A new presence was scented from the entrance of Icestar's den, and he looked up to see his deputy, Ashtail, staring back at him. "The moon's almost fully risen," he informed, motioning outside. "It's almost time to go."

Icestar nodded and got up from his nest, giving a long stretch. He padded from his spot, stopping right at the front of the den. "Before we go, I want to say goodbye to Silverleaf."

Ashtail dipped his head with respect. "I'll start getting the warriors and apprentices ready by the camp entrance," he said, before making his way to the warrior's den.

Icestar stepped into the clearing, and took a deep breath. The air was still cold to the point where his nose felt frozen, but the snow had cleared away, and hadn't been coming down for almost a full

moon. He was thankful for this, because the prey was improving in MoonClan's forests, and Icestar's cats weren't so hungry anymore. Nobody has also been too sick this leaf-bare, so Sweetheart's medicine supply was strong.

He spotted Goldenpaw and Blackpaw padding out of the apprentice's den side-by-side, talking to each other. This reminded Icestar of the events over a moon ago, where Goldenpaw had ran away to the Night Flower for answers to her strange dreams. He had talked about it with Ashtail, Sweetheart, and Goldenpaw's parents, but it had been decided that they will have to wait and see what will happen next. Those dreams included CloudClan within them, and Icestar knew that at tonight's gathering, he will have to talk to Swiftstar about Dewstar's threat and the upcoming war.

"Hi Icestar!" called Blackpaw, noticing that the leader's gaze was in their direction. "Is there anything you need?"

Goldenpaw also turned her head to his direction, noticing him as well. "I was just saying goodbye to Blackpaw before he left," the golden apprentice said.

"No, there's nothing I need," Icestar responded, shaking his head. "Carry along." Then, he left his spot to continue his way to the nursery, where Sagepelt, her kits, and Silverleaf stayed. He was lost in thought of what to do in tonight's gathering, but he fully regained himself again.

Silverleaf was close to having their kits. Dewstar had shown no sign of wanting anything to do with them yet, but Icestar was sure that he would pull something sooner or later. It made Icestar uneasy most of the time, as if Dewstar was lurking in the shadows, waiting for the kits to be born just to snatch them away.

He padded into the nursery, and touched noses with her. "I'll be leaving soon," he meowed to Silverleaf.

"Tell me everything when you get back," she responded with a purr.

"I will," Icestar promised. "Stay safe while I'm gone."

Silverleaf sighed. "MoonClan still has half a moon before anything serious happens . . . besides, I can still protect myself."

Icestar opened his mouth to respond, but Sagepelt cut him off. "She's right, you know. A queen's burning desire to protect their kits only make them stronger." She gave Shadekit, who was sleeping, a lick between his ears before turning back to Icestar. Berrykit stirred, but she did not wake. "I'll be here to watch over her if you're so worried."

"Thank you, Sagepelt," said Icestar. "Bye, you two. I have to go."

"See you soon," Silverleaf mewed, before turning to Sagepelt. In no time, the two began to have start a conversation.

Icestar didn't stick around long enough to listen, he had to take MoonClan to the gathering now. He padded over to Sharpfang. "Watch over MoonClan while I am gone," he ordered the senior warrior. Sharpfang gave a curt nod, and sat near the leader's den so he can have a good look all around the camp. Icestar, who noticed that a group of cats were gathered by the camp entrance, called out, "Is everyone I chose to go?"

"Everyone's here," Ashtail reported.

Icestar called over his shoulder as he began to lead the group outside the camp entrance. He squeezed through the thorn entrance carefully, and began to walk down the cold, grassy slope in the direction of the gathering. His patrol of cats followed close by, Flameheart in particular at his side. Ashtail was in the back of the group, keeping track of everyone as they went along.

Icestar could hear Blackpaw and Amberpaw talking silently to each other about what might happen at the gathering, specifically if DarkClan would or wouldn't try anything this time. Swiftbreeze was talking to Ashtail about Windcloud and Grassheart—obviously wondering if they were doing alright. Goldsun and Squirreltail were expressing their thoughts about Thornheart and his StreamClan mate, Mistyleaf. Apparently, during last moon's gathering, Thornheart explained that his kits were growing fast.

As they trudged along the forest, Icestar wondered all of these things too. Mistyleaf's kits must be close to becoming apprentices by now, because they are in fact older than Sagepelt's kits, who were nearly four moons old now. And speaking of Windcloud and Grassheart . . . it's been over three moons since he returned them back to CloudClan, so their kits are bound to already be born by now. Last but not least, the thought of DarkClan *especially* tugged at his mind. Dewstar is not aloud to try anything, right? He promised that Icestar could have two moons before he attacked . . . and those two moons were nearly up.

Well, I'll be able to find all of this out at tonight's gathering, thought Icestar. *I'm sure everything will be fine tonight.*

* * *

MoonClan finally arrived at the gathering place later on. Three of the Clans were already there—StreamClan, with their leader Lakestar scanning the crowd carefully from upon the leader's rock. CloudClan and MarshClan were also here, but Swiftstar and Stonestar were nowhere to be seen. They must be talking amongst the crowd.

Icestar allowed his Clan to disperse among the clearing to socialize as well, and he himself decided to speak to a few cats before going to the large rock in the center of the clearing. The first cat he spotted was Grassheart, who was eagerly talking to two StreamClan cats, a tom and a she-cat. He weaved his way around the crowd before reaching Grassheart.

"—DarkClan didn't stand a chance two days ago!" Grassheart was saying. "Our patrol met several of their cats, but we outnumbered them and defeated them brilliantly. None of our warriors died, and only two ended up injured."

"That's amazing, Grassheart," said the she-cat. "It sure does seem that DarkClan didn't stand a chance. Well, I'm just glad that StreamClan doesn't have to deal with them much."

"It's great that they were put in their place this one time," Icestar piped up.

Grassheart looked at Icestar, and he purred. "It's great to see you again," meowed the CloudClan warrior.

Icestar found himself purring as well, as if the two were old friends. "How is Windcloud? Did she have your kits yet?" he asked, tilting his head. "It's been a while now."

"She had our kits half a moon ago," he responded. "We named the firstborn Skykit, because the moment she opened her eyes, she wouldn't stop staring at the sky. Her brother is named Flykit. The third and fourth are also toms. Their names are Stemkit and Airkit. The last born kit is a she-kit named Silentkit."

"Why is her name Silentkit?" Icestar asked.

Grassheart shrugged. "Well, she was very quiet the moment she was born. It took moments before she started mewling—little Silentkit scared the life out of both Windcloud and I." He sighed at the memory. "But now she's talking just as much as Flykit. I don't know if her name suits her anymore."

Icestar let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "She sounds lovely."

"How about your kits?" Grassheart asked.

The MoonClan leader shook his head. "It's too early for them to be born yet. Maybe soon, though. Our medicine cat keeps saying that the time is close."

"Then the time probably *is* close," he agreed, nodding.

The StreamClan she-cat was still here, listening to the two toms talk. She looked amused. "I thought talking about the Clan's youngsters was the she-cat's job!" she exclaimed.

Greenheart purred. "Can't help but love my kits, Driftstorm."

Driftstorm nodded. "My son died in battle when he was just a 'paw, but my daughter Mistyleaf gave birth to her kits a few moons ago. Those little things grow fast, *really!* They make me feel older than I am."

Icestar, surprised, looked right at her. "Thornheart, her mate—how is he?"

Driftstorm was surprised for a moment, but then she seemed to realize that Thornheart use to be in MoonClan. "Don't worry," she purred, "he misses his family, but he sticks to the decision he made with Mistyleaf. He is doing well, by the way."

Icestar sighed with relief. Dropeyes, Redsky, Hawktalon and Goldsun would be relieved to hear that. After all, nobody's heard from Thornheart for a while now.

"Some cats still don't trust him, like the apprentices," Driftstorm went on. "They always rummage about he can be sneaking to meet with MoonClan, but we all know that's not true. Every cat got over it a long time ago when we saw how loyal he is."

"Thornheart's a good cat, and he'll stay that way," Icestar agreed.

Grassheart, who didn't know what they were talking about, was paying attention somewhere else. Icestar noticed this as soon as Grassheart nudged him. "Look, Swiftstar and Stonestar are going to the leader's rock. I'm thinking that you should."

"I'm thinking so, too," agreed Icestar. "Bye Grassheart, it was good seeing you. And nice meeting you, Driftstorm."

Driftstorm dipped her head before Icestar left to join the other three leaders upon the rock. He climbed up right after CloudClan's and MarshClan's leader got on top, to be met with an extremely angry Lakestar.

"DarkClan's way past late!" spat the StreamClan leader. "If we wait any longer, the moon's going to disappear soon!"

Stonestar's gaze was stern. "We should begin without DarkClan," he murmured. "StarClan might get angry."

"I agree," Icestar said. He didn't want to meet with DarkClan, anyways—but a thought scared him. They weren't here yet . . . so is it possible that they could be attacking MoonClan while he was gone? Heart pounding in his chest, he turned to Swiftstar and

asked, "what about you?"

"I agree as well," Swiftstar meowed. "The sooner we start the gathering, the better."

* * *

None of the Clans stayed long after the gathering was dismissed. There was still no sign of DarkClan anywhere, and the fear about it rose upon all of the Clans, even MarshClan, who never seem to have problems with them. Icestar and Swiftstar were the two last leaders left, waiting as Lakestar's cats were filing out of the gathering's entrance.

Icestar wanted to desperately talk with Swiftstar. Goldenpaw's dream last moon definitely meant something—that the battle would involve not only MoonClan and DarkClan, but also CloudClan. He took a deep breath, thinking that he should start speaking now.

Swiftstar was sitting at the foot of the leader's rock, waiting patiently as Lakestar's cats continued to leave. He turned to Icestar as soon as he sensed his presence. "Hello, Icestar. It's good to see you," Swiftstar meowed, dipping his head.

"Likewise," Icestar replied, copying his movements. "Listen, Swiftstar. I've been meaning to talk to you. There's been something in my mind all moon . . ."

"If you think I'm crossing your borders or stealing prey—" he began, but Icestar quickly cut him off.

"No, nothing like that!" the MoonClan leader insisted. "I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm just here to talk to you about something." Swiftstar nodded, so Icestar continued to speak. "Last moon, an apprentice of mine received a vision from StarClan about a battle that's yet to happen. In that battle, three Clans were fighting, and it was MoonClan, DarkClan and CloudClan all together."

"CloudClan does not have a plan for going in to battle!" snapped Swiftstar, his fur already bristling. "Who had this dream you said, a

warrior apprentice? Perhaps she was having a false dream."

Icestar wanted to sound as convincing as possible. "Yes, she's a warrior apprentice, but I know for sure that the dream speaks of truth. A past warrior from our Clan also visited her, and she didn't even know who that StarClan cat was. That's how I know for sure that this is going to happen in the future . . ."

"Icestar, I can't risk my cats in battle—"

"Please, think this over. DarkClan is large, and is a terrifying enemy. I need you to fight onto our side," Icestar pleaded.

Swiftstar snarled. "Just because you saved two of my warriors a few moons ago does not mean I am in your debt. I'm not obliged to help MoonClan in battle, instead I am obliged to protect my own Clan." Icestar opened his mouth to protest, but the CloudClan leader shook his head. "I am sorry, Icestar. I wish it wouldn't be this way . . . if there was a better option, I'd take it, but no. Times are too rough for us to make any sacrifices."

And at that, Swiftstar padded away to lead his own Clan out of the clearing.

Icestar, feeling defeated, went to go join MoonClan. He was scared for his Clan's future . . . the chances of beating DarkClan, the largest Clan out of all five, was not likely. He knew that if there wasn't a better option, he'll have to do what's best for his friends, and for his home.

As he lead MoonClan over the territory's borders, most of the patrol was quiet. Amberpaw and Ashtail seemed to be the only cats who sensed Icestar's troubles, but everyone else's attention was elsewhere.

The forest was silent as they stalked through the undergrowth. The only sounds heard was the pawsteps of Icestar and the rest of the Clan as they headed home. A single bird chirped once above on a tall oak tree, but no cat tried getting at it. The bird was probably already watching the line of cats going through the forest aware, aware of the dangers around it, it was too dark to hunt anyway.

Icestar kept on leading his Clan at the very front, every single sense of his alert. He felt that DarkClan was lurking through the shadows . . . waiting to strike the gathering patrol before they reached the MoonClan camp—even though Icestar himself knew that it was not true.

Moments passed, and soon, the camp entrance was finally in sight. It was outlined faintly by the soft moonlight, and worried for his Clan, he sped up. Everyone else followed as well, eager to be home and get in their nests. Though as soon as he squeezed through the camp entrance, he was met by a frantic Goldenpaw.

"Icestar!" she gasped, her eyes as wide as two moons. "You won't believe what's happening—Silverleaf's kitting!"

Icestar didn't have time to ask any questions, though. He was cut short as soon as he heard a painful yowl. His heart skipped three beats. *Silverleaf!*

Chapter Fifty Eight

Edited ✔

Sorry for leaving y'all at that cliff-hanger ;)

Icestar raced to the nursery, tailed by both Goldenpaw and Amberpaw. He tried go inside, but Sharpfang was the one to stand in front of the entrance, acting as if he was a guard. Angry, Icestar growled at his Clanmate.

"What are you doing, Sharpfang? Move!" he snapped.

"I'm afraid I can't do that," Sharpfang said, shaking his head. "Sweetheart told me to keep you out. Sagepelt and Dropeyes are already crowding the place, and she doesn't think you'll be of any help."

Icestar heard another painful yowl come from inside, and he tried shoving Sharpfang out of the way, but it was no use. "I'm her mate, of course I have to be there!" he insisted. "Just let me in!"

Sharpfang growled. "Sweetheart told me no—"

"Let me through, Sharpfang. I'm asking you this as your friend and especially as your leader," Icestar snarled, his voice getting lower. "I just want to see my mate."

"Sorry *leader*, but I have to go against your word this time." Sharpfang stood firm at his spot. "Sweetheart might come out to talk to you for a moment, but I think that's it."

"Let me talk to Sweetheart then," Icestar said quickly.

At an instant, Sweetheart squeezed through the nursery entrance, and met Icestar's worried eyes. "I'm here, Icestar," she said, giving a curt nod. "And I understand you want to go in, but you can't crowd her—"

"Why is she screaming like this?" Icestar asked, cutting the medicine cat off. "I've never heard this before!"

Sweetheart sighed. "Silverleaf's small, it's harder for her than it is for other she-cats especially since she's kitting a half-moon earlier than we all expected. She wasn't ready for this. Nightrose and Shiningmoon are the only help I need right now . . . and you have to understand that."

"No, I won't do anything to discomfort her. I just need to be there, Sweetheart, please. Silverleaf is my mate, and those are my kits," he begged.

"Stay *here*," Sweetheart snapped, before going back in the nursery. Icestar, defeated, took a step back. Goldenpaw rest a comforting tail over his shoulders as Amberpaw stared at him with pity.

* * *

The Clan was doing good at comforting Icestar during the whole kitting. After what seemed forever, it had finally ended. Sharpfang allowed Icestar to enter, and his heart felt like it would stop beating any moment the second he saw three little bundles curled up by Silverleaf's belly. Her eyes were closed with exhaustion—he couldn't imagine the pain a she-cat felt when she went through this.

"You did a good job," praised Shiningmoon, her voice soft. "They look so beautiful."

A purr escaped Silverleaf's throat, but she didn't respond. She just took a weak look at her kits, and her tail flicked happily. Icestar lied right beside them, tired himself, but eyes full of love. He was a father, and it felt like nothing he'd imagined. And even though it wasn't the best time to have these three bundles, he didn't care anymore.

Sagepelt was giving Silverleaf comforting licks on her ear, praising her silently, while Sweetheart turned up as well. "Congratulations, Silverleaf. Two of them seem perfectly fine—I may have to keep a close eye on the third, though. Despite that, you've had two beautiful she-kits and a handsome tom."

"The third kit will be okay, right?" Icestar asked, feeling a little worried.

The medicine cat sighed. "As a healer, I am not allowed to promise anything. I don't know what the future holds. But I'll do the best I can to make her strong. As long as she gets her milk, she might be fine."

"That's good," Icestar murmured with relief, pressing close to his family.

Silverleaf protectively wrapped her tail around the three kits. "Anything you've got to say?" Her voice was very soft and quiet, as if she could not talk even though she wanted to.

"I've got too much to say," Icestar told her. "You shouldn't talk, just rest. It was hard for you."

"Can we name the silver one?" she asked, ignoring him. She was looking worriedly down to the newborn she-kit who weakly suckled milk. The other two, especially her sister, seemed strong though. The tom was not as active; he drank his milk quietly as his sister kicked him.

She looks like she wants to be a warrior already, he thought with a purr.

"I suppose if you have something in mind," he said after observing them.

"I do," she replied. Icestar noticed how much the weak silver she-kit and her mother looked alike—the same silvery pelt that looked as if the stars itself were in her fur. He thought she was just as beautiful as her mother. "I'd like to name her Lightkit."

Icestar pressed his nose on the tiny bundle. "Lightkit . . ." *We'll be needing the light in these dark times*, he thought. "I like it. How about the other two?" He looked at Silverleaf, but she was already asleep. Perhaps they just had to wait until the morning to name the others.

Sagepelt quietly welcomed her own two kits into the den the moment Silverleaf's breath steadied. Berrykit was entranced by

them, her eyes dazzling especially on the strong little she-kit. "This one's so handsome," she complimented.

"Thank you," Icestar purred, heart swelling with pride. Their voices were soft as they spoke, careful not to wake up the tired queen.

"It's true," Berrykit went on. "They're all handsome."

"I think they're *small*," Shadekit said.

"They were just born, idiot," snapped Berrykit.

Shadekit shrugged. "Whatever." And with that, he curled up in his nest that he shared with Berrykit and his mother at the other corner of the den.

Sagepelt looked at him with aggravation. "Don't be so rude, Shadekit! They're newborns as well as the Clan leader's kits, so you should show some respect."

"It's okay," said Icestar. "He's young, he probably does not think much of kitting."

"Well, *I* think it's amazing," Berrykit squeaked. "I want to have kits when I'm older. They'll be so amazing, and I'll have the best mate ever."

"I'm sure you will," Sagepelt purred. "Now go to sleep, more cats want to see." As she walked outside of the nursery to invite some more cats inside, Dropeyes padded out to give the den some more room. Berrykit curled comfortably around her brother as the next visitors entered; Skypelt, Squirreltail and Flameheart.

Skypelt looked down with amazement at the three kits. "Silverleaf has done a good job," he complimented, both sorrow and happiness filling in his eyes the same time. Icestar felt a little bad—this moment must have reminded him of his past mate and the moment their kits had been born. "Ripplefur is probably so proud up in StarClan."

"I hope Goldsun and I have kits one day," Squirreltail commented. "And I wish Ripplefur were here to see this as well . . ."

Icestar nodded. "I wish that too, Squirreltail."

Flameheart looked at the tom with amusement. "Poor kit, having just two sisters. He'll grow up all soft with them around."

"Oh shut up," mumbled Silverleaf, her eyes still shut. She must have woken up.

"Silverleaf is right, any she-cat is tougher than you lot of toms," meowed Sagepelt from her nest. "We've got more to fight through."

Silverleaf purred as Icestar wrapped his tail around her. "I'll have to agree with the she-cats," he said.

Sweetheart padded up to the group, nudging Squirreltail and Flameheart right out of the den. "Let this poor she-cat sleep, you two. Sorry Skypelt, but you have to leave as well. I'll allow more visitors in the morning when Silverleaf is rested."

"I understand," Skypelt said politely, dipping his head at Icestar before making his way outside in the moon-bathed clearing. The only cats left in the den were Sagepelt, her two kits, and Sweetheart. He felt less crowded, and so must have Silverleaf, because her muscles loosened.

"We'll lay out a great future for our kits, Icestar," Silverleaf murmured, resting her head on her paws once more. Her eyes closed, a sign that she was going to try to sleep again.

Icestar nodded with agreement. "We will." But then, his paws felt as they were being pricked by thorns. *I don't know that*, he thought darkly. *Not with this battle coming . . .* He looked down to his kits, worry in his gaze. He knew that the Clan had agreed not to give up their home to DarkClan, and to not give up Icestar in exile just because it was Dewstar's wish. But the more he stared at his newborn kits, the more he felt the desire to change this decision. Maybe they *could* have a great future . . . but it was possible that Icestar may not even be involved in their upcoming lives.

He might not ever come to know them.

"I swear that harm will not come to you Silverleaf," Icestar vowed

silently. "As to our kits."

* * *

Sleep was not easy for Icestar. Even though he terribly needed rest from patrolling all day, then to attending the gathering, then to Silverleaf's painful kitting, he wasn't at peace until he had finally slept. He dreamt of dark and dangerous things up until the point where Dewstar jumped from the shadows and murdered Icestar's family, causing him pain beyond taking his nine lives one by one as violent as a badger would to a cat.

The nightmare went on and on, until he felt a nudging at his side. Finally, he stirred awake to see Silverleaf standing over him, fear in her eyes. By the look of it, the den was dimly lit indicating that it was dawn."Icestar, wake up!" she pleaded. "Wake up!"

Icestar stared with worry. "What happened? Is it the kits?"

"Y-yes," she whimpered. "Something's wrong with Lightkit! I don't know what to do, sh-she's not well, Icestar. Oh, my poor kit . . ."

He stood up from his spot and stared wide-eyed at the tiny silver she-kit, coughing madly as if she was choking. Sweetheart and Sagepelt were standing over her, Sagepelt trying the best she could to see if anything was stuck in her throat while Sweetheart pressed onto her chest, trying to support the kit's breathing.

"Oh my StarClan," he gasped. "When did this start happening?"

"I-I heard Lightkit coughing early in the morning, and when it started getting bad, Sweetheart came rushing in. It started not too long ago," Silverleaf replied, her eyes watching little Lightkit.

"She'll be okay," Icestar said firmly. "She has to be!"

"I don't know, Icestar!" cried Sweetheart, releasing Lightkit's chest and pressing it right back down. "She's so tiny, I do not know if anything can be done."

Icestar shook his head angrily. "StarClan wouldn't approve!" he insisted. "Sh-she'll be alright!"

"Icestar, calm down," said Sagepelt firmly. "Getting very upset won't help your other two kits, especially Silverleaf. I don't think that our ancestors control whether our Clanmates die or not, but I do know that they will be with her even if it comes to the worse."

"It won't come to the worse," he murmured, staring at Lightkit with disbelief.

Silverleaf pressed close to him. "Icestar . . ."

Sweetheart shook her head. "Icestar, I do not think that something can be done. Sh not choking, and I can't find anything wrong with her chest. It's her breathing, but she's too tiny to take medicine . . ."

Silverleaf's eyes widened. "You mean you can't save her?"

"Not me." Sweetheart sounded pained to say this, as if she were implying that she was a failure. "I've done everything. But now, I must let her fate rest in StarClan's paws."

Icestar's mate buried her face in his fur, squeezing her eyes shut. "She's not going to make it."

And with that, the coughing stopped completely. Lightkit's tiny and frail body stiffened, and her chest stopped rising. She was dead. Silverleaf let out a wail of grief, and Icestar pressed his nose to the warm body, which was already cooling down. The two other kits started mewling with discomfort, having woken up from the sound of their anguished mother. He knew that his grief over his daughter was not as great as Silverleaf's, but he felt as if his heart had broken at that very moment.

"Be at peace in StarClan, Lightkit," said Sagepelt sadly. "I'm so sorry, Silverleaf. I wish there was a better way for this to go . . . she was barely a day old."

"I wish it were me," choked out Silverleaf, now crouching over the dead kit. "Lightkit had a full life ahead of her. It should have been me."

Icestar didn't know how to respond to that. The thought of losing Silverleaf was almost unbearable, but he didn't say anything against

it. She was grieving more than any cat there, he had to understand that at the least.

"She was so young, too. Why had her fate been so cruel?" she went on, her eyes dark. "It did not have to end like this!"

Icestar watched sadly, wishing there was something better he could do for his mate other than press close to her and offer her comfort. His mind felt blank and he felt helpless.

"Icestar, why aren't you saying anything?" murmured Silverleaf, her voice shaky.

"I . . . don't know what to say," he said back, his own voice just as low. "I wish it were another way too, but words can't change this moment. Lightkit should have lived."

"Both of you, I'm so sorry," squeaked Sweetheart, looking down to her paws. "I was of no use at all!"

"It's not your fault," Icestar soothed, not leaving Silverleaf's side. Then, he bent closer to her as Sagepelt began to offer comforting words to Sweetheart. "Silverleaf, don't wish you could have died instead. We have our other two kits to take care of . . ."

For a moment, she was utterly silent. Icestar wondered if she'd ever speak to him again, but finally, she was able to make something through. "I know. That's what I'm going to do," she whispered, squeezing her eyes shut. "Lightkit . . ." The last word she made came out as a whimper.

"What's wrong?" asked a new voice. "I heard Silverleaf. Not having kits still, are we?" It was Mousetail.

"One of their kits didn't make it," murmured Sweetheart, her eyes falling onto the tiny body that Silverleaf was pressed to.

Why did you have to take Lightkit, StarClan? Icestar thought grievously. *I've lost family before, but I shouldn't lose my kits! I promised I won't let anything happen to them!*

"I'm so sorry, Silverleaf." Mousetail walked inside, and was now

standing next to the young queen with his tail dropping to the ground. "She was beautiful. The other two will make it, though, that's for sure."

"We don't know that!" she wailed in response.

"Silverleaf—" Icestar tried to soothe, but she already cut him off.

"Just leave me alone," she snapped, glaring at everyone around the den. "I don't need anyone's pity, I just want to be with my daughter." Silverleaf looked back down to the dead kit and sniffed.

Sweetheart looked at Mousetail and Sagepelt and nodded, leaving the den. Icestar hesitated, though. He shouldn't leave even though his mate was grieving. He wanted to be with Lightkit, too, and he especially wanted to comfort Silverleaf the best he could. Their other two kits fell back asleep on the nest, completely unaware of their surroundings.

Some time has passed, and the den had emptied of the cats who were crowding. Icestar and Sagepelt watched Silverleaf quietly in the back of the den, both not knowing what to do, while the four living kits slept—Icestar's own kits cuddled close to their mother while she was bent over their dead daughter, Lightkit. Berrykit and Shadekit were fast asleep on the other side of the den where their nest was.

I wonder how long she's going to be like this? he thought, feeling terrible that there was nothing he could do.

Finally, as if on cue, Silverleaf moved. She turned her head to face Icestar, her gaze clearly sad. "Come and see her," she offered, moving to make space.

Icestar nodded and left Sagepelt's side. She gave him an encouraging smile as Icestar took his place beside his mate.

"She's dead, and yet . . . she's so bright," Silverleaf said, eyes on Lightkit's fur. "Maybe it's a sign from StarClan that she's okay up there."

"Do you feel better?" Icestar asked.

She shook her head. "I will never feel better from this. But Lightkit's in StarClan. She'll be happy there." Silverleaf paused, and looked up to him. "I'm glad we got to meet her, and that we got to name her."

"And the other two kits?" he asked again, beckoning to the sleeping tom and she-kit. "What shall we name them?"

"Not now," she responded, shaking her head. "Soon."

Icestar nodded. "Alright, but I've got several good names in mind—"

He was immediately cut off. Ashtail, his deputy, had barged into the den, panting heavily. "I-Icestar!" he said, eyes wide. "S-sorry to ruin your moment . . . but I need you. There's something happening at DarkClan's border."

"What's happening?" he growled, claws outstretching.

"My patrol met Dewstar," he gasped, still out of breath. "Dewstar . . . and his whole Clan are there. He said that time is up. He is expecting you!"

Chapter Fifty Nine

Edited ✔

All of you keep on going how I leave too many cliff-hangers XD. I can't deny that I do, it's honestly fun to add them. Well anyways, it's almost done so I hope you all can get the best of book one before we move on to book two.

Also, I am sorry for not updating in August. One, I was trying to work out how the conclusion shall be. Two, I was on vacation! Now I'm back and so is school, so the updates will also become regular as well!

Icestar's muscles became tense as soon as his deputy gave him the report, his heartbeat quickening as he pictured the war starting in his head.

It's time!

"We must go. I'm afraid of what will happen to my patrol if we wait any longer," Ashtail said, looking down to his paws. "It's really time . . ."

Slowly, Icestar stood up from his spot. "Will you be okay, Silverleaf?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" She pulled their two kits closer to her belly, her tail wrapping around them protectively.

"Dewstar is waiting for me at the border," he explained, taking a deep sigh. "We might be heading into battle soon. I want to know if you'll be okay."

Finally, after thinking things through, she managed to nod. "Of course I'll be. I lost Lightkit, but I won't lose them two." Her gentle gaze swept over their living two kits, eyes filled with love and sorrow. "I promise that they'll be okay no matter what. And I

especially won't let myself die for their sake."

"I'll watch over her," Sagepelt declared, standing up from her spot. "She just had kits, but even so . . . that won't stop her from keeping them safe."

Icestar nodded firmly. "Be strong, you two." Reluctantly, he left his place from the nursery. If only DarkClan never existed, how fine things would be for MoonClan! He padded in to the clearing, where cats were murmuring unsurely. "Which cats have you taken to your patrol?" Icestar asked his deputy.

"Rainwhisker, Fireshade, Dawnstripe and Goldenpaw," he replied. "Right now, they're facing DarkClan. We cannot let them be any longer, they're expecting you and I don't know how long they're willing to take."

He stopped in his tracks. "Okay, I'll need a battle plan."

"We must take the cats who are most willing to go ahead," Ashtail said, looking around the Clan.

Icestar nodded. "I'm going to make the announcement."

"Be quick!" he urged.

The leader left his spot and raced up the Moonrock, trying his best not to slip up the frosty stones. His gaze traveled across the camp, and the cats of MoonClan watched him just as carefully.

"I'm sure you've all heard, but Dewstar is expecting us!" he announced. Ashtail stood firm at his spot while cats looked at him wide-eyed, probably wondering where his patrol went. "The plan is happening half a moon too early, but we can't be faltered. We have to go and let Dewstar know what's rightfully ours!"

Murmurs of agreement rippled through the crowd, and Sharpfang called out, "I'll stay here and watch over the camp!"

"Are you sure? You're one of our best fighters," Ashtail protested unsurely.

"I'm sure," Sharpfang said. "I want to keep my kits safe, and as well as Icestar's new kits too. If a DarkClan patrol comes to attack, I'll protect them with my life!"

"You may stay, Sharpfang." The gray-furred leader gave a curt nod. "Volefur, you and Blackpaw will come with me," Icestar ordered. "Along with Swiftbreeze, Ashtail and Flameheart." They picked their way out of the crowd to stand by the Moonrock. "Stonetooth, lead Goldsun, Squirreltail, Hawkheart and Redsky close behind me."

"Will do, Icestar!" Stonetooth called, beckoning his cats forward.

Amberpaw's eyes met Icestar's. "Will I be going with you?" she asked, frowning.

Icestar shook his head. "I'm sorry, Amberpaw. I need you to stay here and protect the camp."

"But Icestar!" she protested.

"Stay *here*," he said firmly. "I know you are my apprentice, but we can't leave the weak unprotected. Skypelt, you stay as well."

"I'll take care of the camp too!" declared Mousetail.

Adderclaw stood up tall. "As will I, Icestar. We may be elders, but we can fight."

"Thank you," he meowed to them, dipping his head with respect. "We'll need your old battle skills."

Mousetail and Adderclaw both dipped their heads back, before returning to the elder's den. Icestar noticed from his position how confident all four elders were about protecting MoonClan in this battle-to-come, even though they were old and supposedly weak. *They're stronger than they seem*, he thought. Finally, he snapped out of his thoughts and returned his gaze to the Clan.

"What will I do, Icestar?" Petalwing asked, her head poking through the moving crowd of cats. Everyone was trying to get with their assigned party, an attempt to be organized.

Icestar thought for a moment. "Petalwing, lead Shiningmoon, Shadowheart, Crowflight and Nightrose close by my patrol. Stick in two groups and have one stay by the camp, and another one farther out. Cover as much vulnerable spots as possible to keep the camp protected, understand?"

"Yes, Icestar!" Petalwing said, gathering her patrol together.

"When I leave, be ready," he called out, giving a swift glance as Silverleaf, hoping she'd be okay. She gave him a reassuring nod before he leaped off the Moonrock, landing unsteadily onto his paws.

Ashtail met by his side a moment later, along with the patrol he'd chosen. "I'm not thrilled about battle, but I'm happy to be fighting for MoonClan," said Flameheart, letting out a steady purr of encouragement.

"Me too," Blackpaw agreed.

"Time to put in everything I trained you, Blackpaw," Volefur meowed, nudging the black-furred apprentice.

"I hope we'll be fine," he murmured back, looking down to his paws.

"We have to be," Icestar encouraged, trying not to tremble. "We'll finally be fighting this war through and through. StarClan must be on our side. After all, we've done the good deeds while DarkClan broke the warrior code countless amounts of time. We *must* survive this!"

I wonder if Lightkit is watching over us, too, he thought sadly.

Ashtail nodded with agreement, pressing close to Swiftbreeze. "You're right. MoonClan has been through too much to lose. Even with small numbers, nobody can beat us."

"Right," Swiftbreeze whispered, perhaps feeling more reassured. "We'll survive this."

"By the way," Ashtail meowed, turning his glance to Icestar. "Since when have you been so level-headed?"

* * *

The moment Icestar left behind MoonClan's camp, his patrol grew silent, and he could smell a fear-scent rising from Blackpaw. All of the other patrols dispersed among the forest, and the follow-up party followed close behind Icestar's own group of cats. He tried to be silent as he stalked through the undergrowth, but he felt his paws moving quicker than they should, farther and farther away from Silverleaf, and closer to Ashtail's patrol who were trapped amongst Dewstar's Clan.

DarkClan's borders were coming close. His paws pricked with anticipation, his belly fluttered with butterflies and his mind felt unsure. *Fighting Dewstar at last*, he thought, creeping up the slope towards part of MoonClan's stolen territory. He had fought Dewstar before when Silverleaf was but an apprentice, and that felt like a long, long time ago.

Things must definitely have changed since then. Dewstar and Icestar both were stronger, more determined, and leaders of Clans—each bearing nine lives. A battle against his own brother might be painful, and a long one too. Icestar was hoping deep down that Dewstar would somehow decide to change his mind after all, so that no fighting would actually happen, but that was but a dream.

Chances were, the battle would be unfair by many. DarkClan was huge, and MoonClan . . . not so much. *But we'll get through it somehow*, he thought, remembering his newborn kits, mate, and the rest of his comrades. *We always have*.

Ashtail came a bit closer to Icestar and hissed, "There they are!" The deputy's tail pointed past the trees into a clearing that stood right in the center of MoonClan and DarkClan's shared borders. He crept closer to look at them; surrounded by what seemed to be two Clans in one, cramped in that clearing, keeping eyes out on all corners of the forests.

As Icestar looked around for cats of Ashtail's patrol, he spotted a flashing white pelt that he knew too well. Dewstar's eyes scanned the trees, looking very familiar with the undergrowth that protected MoonClan. Finally, their eyes met.

For a moment, Dewstar stared before calling out sharply, "I know you are there!"

Icestar, knowing that there was no going back, outstretched his legs. "I'm here just like I promised," he spat, stalking out of the undergrowth. The cats of DarkClan turned to his direction.

"Icestar!" someone gasped—one of the cats from Ashtail's patrol, and by her voice, he could tell that it was Dawnstripe.

"Finally, you're here," Dewstar said, stepping in front of Dawnstripe. It was weird seeing them stand by each other—he remembered how close they use to be before Dewstar abandoned MoonClan. "I bet you've been thinking a lot about my decision . . . and either way, things will always go the way I planned, huh?"

"You don't know that," growled Icestar.

Ashtail stepped up. "MoonClan is different from when you left. You'd be surprised how strong we are!"

A few cats murmured with agreement.

"So what is your answer to my proposal, Icestar?" asked the DarkClan leader. "Giving up your Clan to me? It would be very wise if you do. Look at *my* Clan compared to yours; not enough warriors, huh?" There was a taunting look in his cold blue eyes. "Or are you going to give up your warriors and fight me? Your chance of winning is low."

"But there's still a chance," murmured Icestar.

"What was that?" he spat, stepping closer. "What is your answer, Icestar? Speak up! Or are you too scared?"

"Making an enemy out of MoonClan was your worst decision yet!" Icestar turned to look at his cats. Ashtail's eyes flickered with hope, and Swiftbreeze gave a small nod of encouragement even though her tail was tucked to her belly in fear. Flameheart seemed nervous in meeting DarkClan in battle, but Icestar knew that he was a MoonClan cat inside. He would fight for the right cause.

Rainwhisker, Goldenpaw, Dawnstripe and Fireshade were inching closer and closer together, until they were all back-to-back, facing the large crowd of DarkClan cats around them. They knew what was happening.

Dewstar stepped up one more time. "Well, what's your answer, you coward? Spit it out!"

Rage built up inside Icestar. He shouldn't be thinking, he should act! Dewstar murdered Vinetail, Softpelt, Brightstar, and many more warriors from his own Clan. He betrayed Featherbreeze by joining up with the cats who killed her . . . he caused so much suffering for Sparrowheart. He had to avenge everyone! And yet, it was so hard to respond to Dewstar. They were still brothers, and used to be close no matter how far they drifted apart. They have the same blood and came from the same place, became apprentices and warriors together. He didn't want to fight, but he *had* to.

Icestar forced his dark gray fur to lay flat, and his posture to relax. StarClan was with MoonClan, and had been since the first leaders walked the forests. He will have to fight, even at the cost of his own life.

After all, that's what it means to be a warrior. An unbreakable vow made to the Clan.

"Dewstar," he finally said. "Who do you think the cats of MoonClan are?"

"Weaklings, liars and soft-hearted fools," he replied harshly, and almost immediately. "Tell me your decision before I decide for you, Icestar!"

"And what about StarClan?"

Dewstar's claws clenched the ground. "They may be there, but they are dead! Everyone who dies, *dies,* and shouldn't have an influence on us who live." Suddenly, he tensed, and his blue eyes became angry. "Stop asking me questions and answer mine! I know you're stalling because you are scared!"

Icestar stood taller. "We won't give in to you," he challenged. He exchanged a glance with his deputy, before shouting, "MoonClan is going to fight!"

"Oh, is that so?" taunted his brother. "That's not a very wise decision. We outnumber you, and we will take over you."

Rage filled in Icestar's heart. "So what we're smaller in size? I told you that our enemies always fail against us . . . and you're my enemy, Dewstar. You and all cats of your Clan!" He looked at Ashtail, a sign to be ready, and the deputy nodded in response. Dewstar was right, they were outnumbered and didn't have a good chance of surviving DarkClan's piercing claws. But something was making Icestar hold on to the hope of living, though he just didn't know what it was.

He watched his brother intently, wondering what his next move was, or if he was going to make a move at all. Finally, Dewstar's long tail flicked, and his voice rung out loud and clear. "DarkClan, attack!"

In that moment, the cats of the enemy Clan trampled over the border, yowling fiercely in response to Dewstar's order. Icestar tensed up, and his fur bristled with rage as they neared. He could see Dawnstripe and Goldenpaw position themselves back-to-back, fending off a large ginger tabby tom and a dark gray she-cat. Fireshade had disappeared among the crowd, and so had Rainwhisker.

Icestar's cats had already begun to fight too, with two of his patrols charging through the undergrowth and into the large clearing. He knew that his Clan was okay . . . now, he had to help Dawnstripe and her apprentice. They were in the midst of all this trouble!

With all of his strength, he pushed passed three DarkClan warriors who were trying to hold him back from reaching his Clanmates, but before he could go, a large weight suddenly pinned him to the bare and cold forest ground, claws sinking into his fur. Icestar struggled to see who had him under his claws, and he noticed easily that it was Lizardpelt.

"You're not going anywhere," she hissed menacingly, eyes sparking with triumph. "After all the troubles you caused me, I'll kill you nine times over!"

Icestar thrashed madly. "Get off of me!"

"Not until you're *dead*!" she growled, diving in to give his neck a killing bite. Before she was able to sink her long fangs down, Icestar grabbed her with both of his paws, sinking his claws into her head and then he began to kick her stomach, trying his best to land scratches on her.

She coughed in response, and broke free from his grasp. Blood was dripping down her fur, making her look more evil than she already was. With the chance that he had, Icestar shoved her off and leaped to his paws before pouncing at her, barring his teeth with a hiss.

Lizardpelt's tail lashed angrily. "You're not scary, Icestar!"

"I'm not trying to be," he snapped, bowling her over. Furiously, he raked her belly with all the strength he could muster, but she didn't give up just yet. She managed to struggle out of his grasp, hooking her claws to his ears to make him hiss in pain. He forced himself to go through the terrible feeling, and ripped his ear apart from her claws, feeling the blood drip down. Without hesitating though, he grabbed ahold of her scruff and flipped her over so he could get a clean view of her vulnerable spots. Then, he lunged to her neck before she could struggle.

Lizardpelt gasped as soon as his teeth sunk down into her neck. "Y-you murderer," she struggled.

Icestar didn't let go until she stopped moving. When he realized that she was dead, he immediately left her body where it was and looked around for Dawnstripe and Goldenpaw, wondering where they were. In no time, he spotted the pair to see that they had been separated; Dawnstripe was tackling down the large tom, and Goldenpaw being ripped to shreds by the she-cat.

Without taking a glance back at Lizardpelt's unmoving body, he raced for Goldenpaw. He knew very well that she couldn't fight as

well as her brother and sister, and she had been the most afraid of this battle out of all the cats in the Clan. She didn't stand a chance!

"Goldenpaw!" Icestar yowled, hoping the she-cat would turn her attention away.

"I-Ice . . . star!" she sputtered, trying to break free from her attacker.

The gray she-cat forced Goldenpaw to look up at her. "*I'm* your opponent! Pay attention to me!" she snarled.

Icestar raced over there, and grabbed ahold of her thick-furred tail, pulling her off of the defenseless apprentice. "Coward!" he meowed angrily. "Why don't you fight someone your own size?"

"That little weakling is just about dead anyways," growled the gray she-cat.

With a battle yowl, he charged at her with outstretched paws aiming to land on her. But with swift reflexes, she leaped out of his way and he missed, falling to the ground. He quickly recovered himself before she could attack him, and he stared at her intently. The she-cat studied him in return, her piercing blue eyes watching his every move. Both of them had bristled fur and lashing tails, growling defensively.

Icestar noticed how lithe she was, looking almost identical to Silverleaf's shape. This cat herself looked old . . . by any chance, was she Ripplefur's mother? She looked almost too much like Silverleaf, and if she had any relations to her then that would be the most logical answer.

"What, do I look like someone you knew?" she growled, noticing how Icestar was staring at her.

"You were close to Ripplefur, weren't you?" he asked, trying to figure out if his thought.

The she-cat tensed for a moment. But then, she yowled, "Don't say that name in my presence!"

"I bet she was your daughter," Icestar went on. "Would you really

attack the Clan that she loved?"

The gray she-cat snarled. "So what if I was Ripplefur's mother? She's gone, and so is everyone I ever loved! It's all thanks to your own pathetic mother, taking her away from me. Featherbreeze didn't think I'd *ever* make her happy!" Her gaze did not falter. "I *will* attack your Clan. It's what took her away from me in the first place!"

"Ripplefur was happy in MoonClan!" Icestar convinced. "She had kits of her own, you know. You're going to kill them if you continue this battle!"

"Dewstar chose to have this battle, and we're merely fighting it for him," she said angrily, charging from her spot and furiously swiping his nose. "I don't get what you're trying to do, but we're *enemies*. Battle is no place to talk!"

A scratch on Icestar's nose stung, beginning to bleed immediately. The blood began to trickle down and he wiped it away before he could breathe it in. He looked at her, eyes becoming cold. He didn't want to kill her, especially because she could have told Silverleaf many things about Ripplefur that no cat knew. But this she-cat obviously did not want to talk. She just wanted to fight.

"If that is the way you want it, then I'll kill you," Icestar snarled, his voice getting lower.

She didn't respond. Her claws swiped the air, aiming a blow on Icestar's head, but she missed since he dodged it. *Goldenpaw, please hold off until I defeat this she-cat!* he thought with a sense of urgency, risking a glance at the poor apprentice. Many tufts of her fur had been ripped out, and her l blood was slowly pooling around her from the many open wounds she had received.

"Keep your eyes on the battle!" snapped the DarkClan cat, diving down to bite onto Icestar's leg.

Surprised, Icestar fell to the ground, a sharp pain emitting from the area she attacked. His thoughts quickly ran from Goldenpaw and back to the she-cat who had him pinned to the ground. Her eyes narrowed. "Remember this, Icestar: my name is Coldrose, and I'll be

the one to kill you tonight," she hissed into his ear, sounding much different than she had before.

"A lot of cats want me dead, but I'm still living," he said in response, trying to mimic her tone.

Coldrose brought her paw to his neck, trying to hold him down as he kept attempting to kick her off. He coughed and sputtered as she brought her paw further down, and his hindlegs pressed up against her belly, trying his best to shove her off. But it was no use . . . although Coldrose was old, she was certainly strong and much more experienced than Icestar.

Suddenly though, he had an idea. He remembered a far-back battle training move he did with Ashtail once as an apprentice. He would just have to use that technique!

Icestar's hindlegs loosened completely, and he stopped moving altogether. Darkness overwhelmed him as he shut his eyes, then he stopped breathing as well. Coldrose's paw let go of his neck, and she climbed off of him. "Now I'll just wait until he wakes up again," he heard her murmur. "Curse leaders for having nine lives!"

He couldn't believe that the move had worked! Abruptly, he jumped up, and tackled Coldrose to the ground before she could say anything.

"Wh-what?" she gasped, her eyes wide at the sight of him back on his paws. "H-how did you wake up so quickly?"

"I must be lucky," Icestar responded, sinking his claws into her belly. She yowled out in pain as he sliced her cheek open. "This is what happens when you mess with MoonClan!" he hissed, adding another blow to her side. Coldrose was whimpering in pain, her blue eyes shutting tightly. Icestar let go of her completely. "Now get out of my sight!"

"Why don't you kill me?" she demanded, her voice cracking with pain.

"If you want to die, it will not be by my claws," he growled.

Quickly, she scrambled onto her paws, eyes watching Icestar with fear. She didn't stick around long enough to see what would happen, though. She sprang around and pelted out of the clearing, limping slightly from the harsh blow that Icestar dealt to her. Once he made sure that she was gone, he rushed to Goldenpaw's side, relieved to see that she was not dead.

The young apprentice's breaths were swift but shallow, eyes barely open to see Icestar standing over her. "D-did I beat th-the DarkClan cat?" she whispered when she saw him.

"Yes," he said soothingly. "You were amazing, Goldenpaw. Come now, we have to get you back to camp. Amberpaw's waiting."

"I-Icestar," Goldenpaw whimpered, shutting her eyes tight. "I wasn't able to kill . . . I was scared . . . wasn't c-confident enough to save M-MoonClan—"

"Save your strength, I'm taking you to see Sweetheart," insisted Icestar.

Goldenpaw took a deep breath before coughing more blood. "Let me sleep first," she murmured, her eyes still closed. "I-I'm so tired."

"No Goldenpaw, don't sleep! Open your eyes!" he urged, nudging her until her eyes opened once more.

She began to shiver. "Everything hurts," Goldenpaw went on, "And I'm cold."

"I'll warm you," Icestar said immediately, lying down by her side. His fur began to get stained with the blood that was pooling around her, but he didn't care. "See now? Everything will be okay as long as I'm here."

"Let me sleep," she whispered. "All the pain will go away when I sleep." Her voice was barely heard over all the yowling in the clearing, especially since she was talking dangerously low.

"Goldenpaw, don't sleep," Icestar murmured. "If you sleep, you might—" he stopped. Goldenpaw had quit moving overall, and her eyes were shut completely.

She was dead.

Icestar couldn't believe it. He promised Goldenpaw that he'd protect her in the battle. He promised her that she would live, and that she'd be a warrior and continue her life in MoonClan! But it was all a lie; Goldenpaw was dead, and there was no bringing her back. *Fireshade and Nightrose will never forgive me for letting their daughter die*, he thought sadly. *I'll never forgive myself for letting this happen!*

She died because of him . . . because he had failed to protect her. If only he had been quicker, if only . . .

He felt a new presence by his side. Icestar looked up to see Rainwhisker panting, trying to catch his breath. The warrior's pelt was stained with blood, and a long scratch across his face was visible. He must be tired from all the fighting that happened so far.

"I-Icestar!" gasped Rainwhisker once his breath had regained. "Ashtail's having a huge fight with Woodclaw, DarkClan's deputy." He took another large breath before he began to speak again. "And we cannot find Dewstar anywhere . . ."

"What of the camp?" Icestar murmured, his eyes remaining on Goldenpaw's dead body.

"I think they're okay," Rainwhisker said honestly, "but I don't know. I sent Goldsun and Squirreltail to check, but they've never returned. I-I'm sure they're fine though. I mean, it's hard finding the camp, and plus, they have Sharpfang there!"

"Rainwhisker," whispered Icestar. "I wasn't able to protect Goldenpaw . . ."

Rainwhisker tilted his head. "What do you—" suddenly, he stopped himself. The MoonClan warrior finally spotted the limp body next to the leader. "Oh no!"

"She died because I couldn't protect her!" Icestar said again, staring at her bloody body.

"No, Icestar, that is not true," he said immediately. "You didn't kill her, Icestar, so it's not your fault that she is dead! It's all Dewstar's

fault, okay? He's the one who charged this battle."

The leader shook his head. "I promised her—"

"Her life never depended on you," Rainwhisker said, shaking his head. "It was not your fault, and it never was. But I will blame you for not fighting this battle if you keep on grieving like that. Our Clanmates are here with their lives on the line, fighting. We don't have the time to grieve no matter how sad you are. We mustn't let Goldenpaw's sacrifice be in vain. If MoonClan loses this battle, it will all have been for nothing!"

Icestar remained silent, still staring at her dead body.

"Listen, Icestar," snapped Rainwhisker. "If you don't get up and fight, then more lives will be lost! We've got to help our comrades!"

"But I don't know what to do!" Icestar yowled, shaking his head. "Fireshade and Nightrose will forever hate me! Blackpaw won't look up to me anymore . . . and imagine what Amberpaw would say . . ." He tried not to think of the look of horror in Amberpaw's eyes once she found out her sister had died.

"You must fight," Rainwhisker urged, his eyes narrowing. "If you don't move from your spot, and if you do not stop grieving, I will forever blame you if MoonClan loses this battle!" Icestar's eyes widened, and finally, he tore his gaze off of Goldenpaw to look up at Rainwhisker. "I've lost my sister to battle a long time ago, but I didn't stop fighting, Icestar. I fought so that her death wouldn't be in vain, and I saved two cats that day! If I had stayed and grieved over her, those two cats would be dead right now."

Icestar finally seemed to realize what Rainwhisker was trying to say. "You know what? You're right," he murmured. "I will *not* let Goldenpaw's death be in vain." He kept looking down on her golden pelt, his heart feeling as if it had been broken apart.

Rainwhisker gave him an encouraging nod.

"I regret not being able to protect her, but I don't want to lose anyone else," he said, his claws outstretching.

"Come on, Icestar, everyone needs us!" Rainwhisker said, eyeing the large crowd of fighting cats nervously. "Everyone's outnumbered and surrounded . . ."

"We'll get through it," Icestar growled, standing up. His fur was drenched with Goldenpaw's blood, which mixed in with his own that had bled through the scratches that he received from Lizardpelt and Coldrose. He felt tired from fighting, and he had a heartache for his loss, but Rainwhisker's words sunk into his mind; Goldenpaw died for the Clan, and if the Clan itself dies out, then she'd have given her life away for nothing.

With a newfound strength, he charged from his spot and back into the clearing. He must fight to the bitter end to keep MoonClan safe from harm, and that he will.

Sorry for posting this twice T_T Wattpad keeps deleting half the chapter. But anyways, I hope I didnt destroy your feels. I certainly destroyed mine.

Chapter Sixty

Edited ✔

Now the chapter you've all been waiting for: the finale! I'm going to write an epilogue, and then Icetail's Enemy will finally be complete! This'll be my first fanfiction completed! And a warning guys, this chapter will be very . . . PG13. Of course no cussing or nothing inappropriate, it's just a lil bloody. I mean very bloody.

Sorry it took over two months to upload. It took a while to write so originally it was gonna take at least one month, but then I got a concussion so I wasn't allowed to be on Wattpad cause of it. But here we are for the big chapter!

Leaving Goldenpaw's dead body was difficult, but Icestar swore that he'd come back to bury her properly later. He weaved through the battling cats, keeping his eyes on Rainwhisker as he followed the warrior to where Ashtail was. According to him, Ashtail was having an intense battle with DarkClan's deputy, Woodclaw. It didn't sound good by the way Rainwhisker had explained it.

I won't lose any more cats tonight, declared Icestar internally, thinking back to Goldenpaw. Who else had died today? The thought made him scared, but he forced himself to push it to the back of his mind. Right now, he had to focus on saving MoonClan.

Finally, they reached an edge of the large clearing that was bordered DarkClan's forests. Icestar's eyes widened at what he saw.

Ashtail was panting, his fur soaked with blood and filled with scratches. A large gash was could be seen on his right, and one of his ears had been torn off. The worst part about it was his eye . . . Ashtail's right eye had been ripped from its place, bleeding down his nose and mouth as he tried to keep it shut. Woodclaw looked no better—both of his ears were torn, scratches covered the entirety of his pelt, and he was missing many clumps of fur. The two of them

staggered in place, but they each kept eyeing each other strongly, not one or the other backing down.

"Ashtail!" yowled Icestar, racing toward the two.

Ashtail looked up, having to turn his head fully to see his leader and friend approaching. "I-Icestar," gasped the deputy, but the moment it was said, Woodclaw's body flashed from its spot. He had leaped onto Ashtail and pinned him to the ground. Ashtail struggled wildly as his opponent tried to bite down on to his neck.

Icestar didn't waste a second. He and Rainwhisker both tackled Woodclaw off of Ashtail simultaneously; Icestar chomping onto his tail and Rainwhisker yanking his scruff.

"Fox-heart!" spat Icestar, slashing his claws across Woodclaw's muzzle. "You cruel fox-heart!"

Ashtail staggered upwards, panting. "I-I'm saved . . ."

"Don't waste your breath," Rainwhisker advised. "See? I told you I'd get Icestar as quick as possible. I'm so sorry, though . . . about your eye."

"I-it's nothing," murmured Ashtail, as Icestar struggled to keep Woodclaw pinned to the forest floor. "I mean, it doesn't hurt much. I-I'll live through it."

"Doesn't hurt much? We've got to get you to Sweetheart," Rainwhisker said with disbelief. "Icestar, I'll take him back to camp."

"Go quickly!" Icestar's strength was slowly faltering, and he knew that Woodclaw would be able to break free in no time.

Suddenly, something knocked into Icestar's side, throwing him to the ground. "Oh no you don't!" snarled a new voice. He looked up slowly, dizzily, to see the DarkClan warrior Toadskip standing over him, barring his fangs. "We outnumber your Clan, Icestar! There is *no* way you have the power to kill Woodclaw."

"Numbers don't mean anything!" Icestar swiftly got up before

Toadskip was able to reach him. "Ashtail, Rainwhisker—run!"

"There is no where to go!" Woodclaw yowled, letting out a menacing *mrrow* of laughter. Five cats surrounded them, including Toadskip and Woodclaw. Amongst them were warriors Icestar never learned the name of, but their builds were strong, and much less battle-scarred than all three of the MoonClan warriors put together.

Icestar eyed Woodclaw furiously. "Don't be so cruel," he snarled, his voice lowering.

"It is not cruelty," replied Woodclaw, wiping blood off his nose with his right paw before meeting the MoonClan leader's gaze. "It's the will of Dewstar. His commands are absolute to me, and I'll do whatever it takes to carry them out." A cruel smile formed on his face.

Icestar felt his haunches press against Ashtail and Rainwhisker. All of them held their ground nervously, especially Icestar. *If we don't get Ashtail to camp soon, he can bleed to death,* he thought with a sense of urgency. *There's got to be something I can do!*

For a moment, all that was heard were the sounds of the battle. Snow was stained red all around them, blood that had come from both Clans, and the air was still and dry as if waiting to see who will pounce first. And then finally, a movement was made.

Everyone's ears snapped towards Ashtail as the deputy staggered forth a bit. "Woodclaw, leave my Clanmates alone. Let us continue our battle!"

Icestar's eyes widened. Why would Ashtail do such a thing? His condition was terrible, and he couldn't see from his right eye! How would he dodge a blow coming from a spot he couldn't see? Icestar looked worriedly at his friend, and Rainwhisker squirmed uncomfortably, probably thinking the same thing.

"The odds of you winning are no bigger than a mouse!" taunted Toadskip. "Do it, Woodclaw, and when you're done with him, we can go kill the rest of these MoonClan scum!"

"Perhaps that's a good idea," Woodclaw said, outstretching his bloody claws. "Let's do this, Toadskip." He took a step forward, and so did his Clanmate.

Ashtail growled. "What a coward, Woodclaw!"

Woodclaw suddenly stopped walking. "What do you mean *coward*?"

"You're too afraid to fight me on your own," snarled Ashtail, narrowing his one eye. "What's this, two against one, especially after I challenged just *you*?"

"Don't think I'll pity you!" he snarled back.

"I knew it! You're too much of a coward to fight me one on one, Wood*kit*," Ashtail taunted, standing taller.

"What in StarClan's name are you doing?" gasped Icestar.

Ashtail flicked his tail to silence him. "I'm trying to finish what we started," he murmured. "Woodclaw, this is *our* battle!"

Woodclaw's face scrunched up, obviously irritated. His eyes blazed with anger, and his claws were digging the ground so much that his paws seemed like they were about to get buried. "If you want a fight, that's what you'll get!" Without earning, he leaped from his spot, bowling into Ashtail's direction—but he was too slow. Ashtail, despite his injuries, leaped to the air, turning over and landing squarely onto Woodclaw's shoulders.

"Woodclaw!" gasped Toadskip, running forward. "Come on, you two!"

Icestar stepped in front of Toadskip before he had the chance to run. "Do you think we can take on four, Rainwhisker?" he called, turning over his shoulder to spot the gray tom.

"Of course!" snarled Rainwhisker.

Toadskip growled with frustration, and turned to the other three cats. "Let's get him!" he snarled. One of the she-cats leaped besides Toadskip, while the other she-cat and tom ran in Rainwhisker's

direction. Deep down Icestar felt unconfident about taking on two cats at once, but he had to try . . . to live for the sake of Goldenpaw, his mate, his kits and his Clan. *And I won't die until I get to face Dewstar*, he thought, trying to build up his confidence.

"I'll charge from the back," the she-cat said, running from her spot. "You get him up front!"

"Not if I can help it!" Icestar whipped around and slashed his claws across the she-cats cheek before her claws met his haunches. For a moment, he felt successful to land the first blow, but it was short-lived when he felt Toadskip's piercing claws stab into his spine.

Icestar held back a yowl, and instead grunted with pain as he ripped himself free from Toadskip's grasp. The she-cat, angry that she had been hurt, grabbed on to Icestar's tail and yanked him backwards, causing him to tumble to the ground. She kicked him over before he could react, so that his belly was facing towards the sky.

"Rip 'im apart!" she yowled, biting down onto his belly.

Icestar couldn't hold it anymore. He screeched with pain, and kicked her face away from his belly before she could land a blow that could seriously injure him. Toadskip smashed Icestar's head to the ground with his back paws while at the same time, scratched his neck, but Icestar moved away before it could go deep enough.

Gasping, he curled up his body up to attempt to kick Toadskip off, but it was no use. He was completely pinned down. *Why did I think I could take them on myself?* Icestar thought with frustration and dread.

"He's completely trapped!" laughed Toadskip, pressing down harder to keep him still. "What do you think we should do with him?"

"Kill him, of course!" snapped the she-cat.

Icestar couldn't see anything. His face was turned sideways, planted to the dirt, so he couldn't tell if Rainwhisker was having the same troubles as him. What about Ashtail? Was he okay? Icestar tried to

squirm free, scared that Ashtail's injuries had finally caught up with him, but Toadskip's claws began to sink into his head. Icestar stopped moving, scared that he would get punctured to death.

"I think we should make him have a slow and painful death," Toadskip said. "It's what he deserves! The mouse-brained leader thought he could defeat DarkClan, the strongest in all the forest! It was a mistake not to give in to us."

Icestar growled. "It was never a mistake!" he managed to say.

"Shut it!" Toadskip pressed Icestar's head further down to the dirt.

The she-cat was silent for a moment, before she gasped. "I have an even better idea! Let's let him watch his precious deputy die before his eyes, just like when he had to watch his poor little mother and father die. When Ashtail's dead, let's finish Icestar off ourselves!"

Icestar yowled some incoherent curse. Nothing could be made out because of his inability to speak at the moment.

"That's a perfect idea!" Toadskip let Icestar's head up a little, and the moment he found freedom, he tried to break free. But it was impossible with both the weights of Toadskip and the she-cat keeping him down at once. The she-cat forced his head to face the direction where Ashtail and Woodclaw were fighting no matter how much Icestar resisted. "Now watch and see your precious friend die!"

"Ashtail!" Icestar yowled, catching sight of the battle.

Even though Ashtail seemed to hear him, he couldn't turn to Icestar's direction this time. His total attention was on Woodclaw alone. It was understandable—the moment Ashtail lost focus of the fight in front of him, he'd get pinned and killed.

Icestar watched with horror as the two fought viciously, swiping and landing blows on each other's faces, ripping out each other's fur. Blood and fur flew everywhere, and the two of them were covered scarlet. Woodclaw crashed into Ashtail, and bit down hard on his forepaw, but Ashtail rolled him over and pressed his body to

the ground with extended claws.

Both of them growled ferocious threats to each other, but Icestar didn't pay attention to the words being said. *I wish I could help him!* he thought, trying to squirm free o Toadskip and the she-cat's combined weight. Still, he couldn't escape. Frustrated, he tried to bite on to the she-cat's paw, which was close to his face, but unfortunately, she must have sensed this and moved it away.

"He'll die any moment, Icestar," she said with venom, "so don't worry. Your time will end soon, too."

Please, Ashtail, live! he thought, uselessly watching Ashtail's desperate battle.

Ashtail leaped up in the air as Woodclaw charged at him again, and he landed on his opponent's back, clinging on as the DarkClan deputy tried to shake him off. Finally, Woodclaw leaped into the air and flipped himself over, landing on his back, crushing Ashtail underneath. Ashtail coughed at the loss for breath, but despite that, wrapped his forearms around Woodclaw, tearing at his belly. Woodclaw yowled with pain and struggled to his paws as Ashtail coughed, trying the best he could to regain his breath.

"Y-you're at a t-tough one!" Woodclaw said menacingly in his deep, pain-filled voice.

Ashtail growled. "You too," he breathed, barely able to spare his breath.

"It's time to finish this!" Woodclaw declared, getting ready to attack again. Ashtail watched his opponent's every move carefully, his tail flicking and his ear drawn back. Then, Woodclaw charged head on, leaping into the air. Ashtail leaped too, and in a second they clashed, with Woodclaw's teeth buried in Ashtail's neck, and Ashtail's claws teared open Woodclaw's stomach.

The two of them collapsed to the ground, wheezing and coughing. Icestar's eyes were wide, and his body was shaking. "Ashtail . . ." he whispered, watching as his deputy became still. "Ashtail!"

Ashtail's flank moved up and down one last time, and any sign of him breathing completely faded. He had taken his last breath.

"Woodclaw is dead!" exclaimed Toadskip, surprise in his voice. He looked down to Icestar. "He killed our deputy!"

"They killed *each other*," the she-cat said. "Toadskip, now that it's over, it's time to kill Icestar. It's not like Woodclaw's death is at a loss if we rip out Icestar's remaining lives. Just imagine what position Dewstar will give us the moment he sees his brother's dead body!"

Icestar wanted to yell. Another one of his precious friends died right before his eyes! His heart couldn't take the grief—first, his daughter, then Goldenpaw and now this. Who else dear to him was he going to lose tonight? *It's over for me*, he thought. *I'll be finished off before I even get to name my kits with Silverleaf. I'll never see MoonClan again . . .*

"I like the sound of that," snickered Toadskip.

The she-cat dug her claws into Icestar's neck, and he coughed in pain and discomfort. "You do the honors. Avenge Woodclaw!"

Toadskip didn't need to he told twice. He dived down, biting hard onto Icestar's neck. Icestar yowled, trying to struggle free from the unbearable pain. It was a worse pain than he had ever felt . . . this was the feeling of death. His eyes squeezed tight, and his breath quickened. Then, Toadskip bit harder. Icestar's life felt as if it were being drained away, until finally, he stopped moving.

* * *

It was dark when Icestar's eyes opened again.

The moon was full and high in the sky, shining brilliantly down onto the sweet-scented grassy moor he woke up on. The stars weren't visible in the sky, though. Something wasn't right. He got up from his spot, and suddenly fell back down as he felt an unbearable pain in his neck, followed by a tight feeling in his chest.

Suddenly, he froze. Was he in StarClan? Did Toadskip actually kill

him? Icestar looked down to his paws, which weren't bloody at all. In battle, he was drenched in Goldenpaw's blood, especially on his paws, so why did he look so clean? *I must have died,* he thought. It was a battle. after all. Then, a thought came to his mind. *Maybe Goldenpaw and Ashtail are here too!*

He forced the pain away and he got right back up on his paws again, taking unsteady steps towards the forest in the near distance. He wanted to see his Clanmates . . . figure out who else had been killed. He wanted to see everyone again before he lost he chance.

Icestar broke into a run. He couldn't be the only one here, right? There has to be some other cat nearby! As he ran nearer to the forest, he could make out a few silhouettes in against the darkness, standing by the trees as if expecting for him.

His lungs felt clear, and his energy didn't exhaust at all. He only seemed to be running faster and faster towards the shapes in the darkness, until finally, he stopped.

They were coming towards *him.*

Nine cats were walking, all neatly alined next to each other. He watched them, hoping to see Goldenpaw or even Ashtail emerge out of the crowd, but as they approached, he realized something else.

Those were his nine lives.

Brightstar, Featherbreeze, Grasspelt, Shard, Vinetail, Ripplefur, Whiteeye, Sparrowheart and Darkstar were all there, approaching him confidently as he stood with awe and confusion.

Finally, they reached him. Brightstar dipped her head. "Welcome to StarClan, Icestar."

He didn't know what to say. "A-am I dead?" he whispered, fearful that DarkClan had won.

Brightstar sighed. "You are, but not quite." She looked at Featherbreeze, who said, "Those DarkClan cats only managed to take one of your lives. Now your body is recovering itself so you can wake up again."

"So that's how it works," Icestar murmured, thinking about the nine separate times a leader had the chance to live. Then, he felt distressed and remembered that this peace was but a dream. "They've completely overpowered us! As soon as I wake again, I'll probably be too weak to move, and I'll just get killed again!"

Darkstar shook her head. "No, don't think like that. There's always hope."

Shard nodded with agreement. "Something is stirring up in the battle, Icestar. When you wake up again, you'll have a chance. Grasspelt and Vinetail have made sure of it." The two of them gave him a look of confidence.

"But how?" Icestar pleaded.

Sparrowheart shook his head. "That we cannot say. But as long as StarClan has power, we did everything we could to help."

"When will I wake again?" he murmured, looking down to his paws. "I have to return to battle. MoonClan's fighting on their own!"

Whiteeye gave him a sympathetic look, while Ripplefur said, "You're going to wake soon. You've been . . . sleeping for quite a while. Don't worry Icestar, we are on your side."

Everyone murmured an agreement.

Icestar looked at each cat separately, feeling just a little more confident. Well, if StarClan is on his side, he *had* to win. Right?

"I have one more question," he announced. "How are Ashtail and Goldenpaw? A-and what about Lightkit?" His voice got smaller when he mentioned his dead kit.

"They're all fine," Featherbreeze purred.

"I'd like to see them."

"I'm afraid not," she meowed, shaking her head. "Don't worry, they're okay. It's just not best for any of you to see each other now." She looked at Brightstar. "Trust that they are watching you."

"May the stars be with you, Icestar," Darkstar said, stepping up. "Our spirits will be beside you."

Icestar gasped for breath, his eyes opening wide. He burst up from his spot, looking around him to see where he was now. He was back in the clearing between MoonClan and DarkClan. The sun was long gone, and the moon had broken out. It was barely visible against the dark gray clouds that draped across the sky.

As he turned his eyes down to the clearing, he realized that shapes all around him were still fighting, tearing at each other's pelts, leaping on each other's backs and running around looking for refuge. His vision cleared, but it was hard to make out who was fighting who. *Where is MoonClan?* he thought, looking around for some cat from his own camp. He couldn't find anyone, let alone look properly at any DarkClan cats.

He stumbled a little, gasping for breath, but suddenly, he felt soft fur touch his. He looked to see his apprentice Amberpaw leading him to the tree-line on MoonClan's side, with Rainwhisker by her side as well. There was also someone else . . . a cat that took him a few more moments to recognized.

Swiftstar?

Opening his mouth to scent, he realized that the only scents in the clearing wasn't of blood and two enemy Clans, but he could also pick up a trace of CloudClan. Were they here, too? He let Amberpaw lay him down in a safe place, not far from the clearing. Sweetheart stood over him, rubbing poultice on his wounds and placing cobwebs where there were scratches. A few cats lay around him, injured from both MoonClan and CloudClan.

Amberpaw looked at Sweetheart, her gaze worried. "Will he be okay?" she asked, her voice a little soft. "He took such a fatal blow."

"Of course he will," the medicine cat replied, licking behind Icestar's ear where a faint scratch had appeared. "He always pulls through. Besides, he has eight more lives to spare, right Icestar?" She looked

at him, searching his eyes to see if he was aware of his surroundings.

He nodded a little, and then strained himself to get stand up. "Amberpaw, I told you to stay in camp. To protect Silverleaf."

"You have to stay lying down," scolded Sweetheart. "You'll just reopen your wounds!"

Icestar shook his head. "I will be fine."

"I'm sorry for leaving, Icestar," she meowed. "Silverleaf was fighting, and your kits seemed to be well protected. A few DarkClan warriors broke into camp, but it wasn't much so Sharpfang sent me to the clearing because he thought you might have needed help."

Rainwhisker sighed. "I was about to be slain by those DarkClan warriors until she came. After helping me chase them off she just . . . dashed away, before I could even thank her."

Rainwhisker and Amberpaw exhanged glanced, and the apprentice licked her chest with embarrassment.

"Where to?" Icestar asked, relieved to see he was okay. Rainwhisker didn't look as bad as Ashtail did before he died, or even like Goldenpaw. He seemed fine, especially with his wounds treated by Sweetheart.

"I went to CloudClan," Amberpaw announced. "I couldn't leave us to die like this, so I had to get help."

Icestar was surprised. "But they declined to help us before!" he gasped. "They really came to help?" He remembered how firmly the CloudClan leader had said no to his request for backup for the upcoming battle with DarkClan. He looked at Swiftstar, who was waiting patiently by Sweetheart's side.

"I had a dream, Icestar," he explained. "Grasspelt and Vinetail visited me and told me to defeat the darkness. Just after I had the dream, Amberpaw came running to me with a message to help defeat DarkClan." His eyes darkened. "I knew I was risking CloudClan, but if StarClan is guiding us, then we have a stronger

chance at winning this battle. We have decided to help you not through our own kindness, but through the will of StarClan themselves."

Icestar stared at his apprentice, shocked. "I can't believe you actually did it," he murmured.

"I'm not in trouble, am I?" she asked with worry.

Icestar felt himself burst with pride. His own apprentice turned out to be a quick thinker and an evidently fast runner through all their moons of hard work and training. Despite her loud and bubbly personality, she didn't let it get the best of her for once. He suppressed a purr.

"Of course not, Amberpaw. In fact, may have even saved the whole Clan!" She looked as proud as he felt for a moment, her chest puffed out as if she were ready to boast to her siblings. Then, Icestar froze. Amberpaw's own sister had died right before his eyes . . . and she didn't know yet.

For a moment, as Sweetheart tended Icestar's wounds, he wondered if he should break the news to her now. He didn't want her to be distracted if she had to go back into battle, but he also didn't want to break her heart at the same time, and it would be wrong to keep such a thing from her.

Oh Amberpaw . . . I'm sorry I couldn't protect her.

Amberpaw's eyes flashed. "Why are you staring at me like that?" she asked, tilting her head. "Do I look funny? You're looking at me as if I grew a second tail on my head."

Icestar felt guilty. "Sorry." He looked away for a second, then flicked his eyes back to her. "Listen, Amberpaw, I have to tell you something . . ."

She looked down to her paws. "You're about to tell me that Goldenpaw's dead, right?"

He froze, his tail bristling uncomfortably. "Wait, how did you know I was going to tell you that?"

Sweetheart and Rainwhisker's eyes became downcast and their tails dropped with grief.

"I felt it at some point when I was fighting," she murmured. "My spine felt tingly, like a piece of my heart broke off. I thought I was imagining things, but . . ." As she trailed off, Icestar wished he had been there for Goldenpaw sooner. If he had been, maybe she would still be alive. "Don't look so guilty, Icestar," Amberpaw continued, "I bet she was having a good fight. She died saving MoonClan, and I know I have to live for her sake."

"That's right, Amberpaw," Icestar said. "You're much stronger than me when it comes to losing those you love." His eyes flashed with memories of his friends, parents and especially of Dewstar. "Truly."

* * *

"Let me go over the plan one more time," Icestar said, glancing at the cats that had just recovered from Sweetheart's herbs. It was just a few of them—three CloudClan cats, including Swiftstar, and four MoonClan cats—Rainwhisker, Amberpaw, Squirreltail and Hawktalon. "We've got to chase as many DarkClan cats away with a threat to never to come back. Kill only when you have to, and try to stick in pairs so we won't fall into any traps. Got it?"

A few cats nodded, and others flicked their tails to signal that Icestar's order had been heard.

"Okay, good. You charge when Swiftstar gives the signal," he said, pointing to the CloudClan leader with his nose. "I'm going off to find Dewstar."

Amberpaw was trembling with both adrenaline and fear. She and Rainwhisker were paired up, and Swiftstar was with Hawkheart. Squirreltail and the two CloudClan cats were paired to work with one another, and they were already standing by each other's sides.

"I hope Blackpaw is okay," Amberpaw whispered, eyeing outside of the bush. "I'd be devastated if I lost him, too."

Rainwhisker gave her ear an encouraging and comforting lick. "You

won't lose him, not on my watch," he declared.

Icestar inched close to Swiftstar, who was taking the leading position in the front of the party. "I'm leaving now. I wish you good luck," he meowed, before dashing off into the clearing when no cat was looking.

He looked around, wondering where his brother could be. According to Amberpaw, he was nowhere near the camp when they had patrolled the heart of the territory. His scent was hard to pick up through all of the blood that had spilled, and he was especially hard to see in this darkness. Where could he even be fighting?

Icestar prepared himself before he ran deeper into the large crowd of battling cats. Several times, he was been targeted by DarkClan warriors, but had managed to escape easily by running away as fast as he could. Right now, his opponent is Dewstar. He knew that Dewstar was still alive, because this battle was still going on, so he had to find him. Without their leader, DarkClan would have no confidence. But despite thinking this, Icestar still had no intention of killing.

Not yet, at least.

Finally, he spotted familiar white fur standing out of the crowd, overlooking the battle on a high rock on DarkClan's side. Despite the rock being tall, it was hard to see because it was shielded by the trees and the darkness. He looked up and squinted, wondering if that was Dewstar, and the moment his cold blue eyes spotted Icestar, he leaped off the rock and began to run in the opposite direction.

Oh no you don't! Icestar thought, dashing after his brother. Why is he running away and not standing ground? This battle is all his fault, so he should be alongside his Clanmates trying to win. *I can't believe him. He's such a coward!*

Icestar ran into DarkClan's forest, almost smashing his face against a tree that was impossible to see. Thanks to his senses, he smelled it was there first and managed to dodge it, but immediately stumbled into a bush after. He had to hurry, or he was going to lose Dewstar!

Icestar crawled out of the thin branches, shaking the snow off his pelt before beginning to run again, this time trying more carefully not to crash into another tree or bush.

As he ran, Icestar felt cold and hungry, forgetting that he hadn't eaten or slept properly since yesterday. He hoped everything could be over soon, with MoonClan living through. He desperately needed to rest himself.

His jaws were open as he ran through the forest. Despite his bad scenting abilities, he could faintly pick up Dewstar's familiar smell. It was getting closer and closer. Had Dewstar stopped running? Icestar continued deeper into the forest, slowing down only a little to get a better taste of his surroundings. Suddenly, the ground felt as if it were getting lighter and more fragile.

Icestar's ears pricked the second he heard a tumbling rock. For a moment, he wondered what could be making that sound, until he realized that he was somewhere right in front of a large cave that dropped straight down. He stopped abruptly, his paws pushing more snow and rocks down the large deathly trap. A couple more steps and he'd have been dead!

A bush nearby rustled. "I hoped you'd have fell," snarled a familiar voice. Dewstar slowly walked out of his hiding spot, narrowing his eyes. "This was the perfect trap, and you were at least one step away from MoonClan and CloudClan losing this battle."

"I'm not surprised," Icestar replied. "You and your Clan always play dirty tricks!" His fur bristled, and he backed up a little as his brother took a few steps forward.

Dewstar's blue eyes blazed from cold stare to a burning fire. "It is the way we stay strong, above the rest! Noble battles won't get us anywhere. We learn to fight, prepared to kill!"

"Look, Dewstar," Icestar began, "you're a MoonClan cat at heart. It's where you were born from, so why are you picking fights from the cats who raised you?"

"This isn't a time to question! We're going to fight!" he shouted,

inching closer.

Icestar held his ground. "Maybe we can talk," he offered, narrowing his eyes. "If you want this to turn out to a fight, then so be it. But we are still brothers, and I deserve to talk to you one more time."

"You deserve nothing, Icestar," snarled Dewstar softly. "I don't get why you think you're so pure. You killed as many cats as I have, and fought as many battles as I have. Just because I switched Clans, it doesn't mean I'm worse than you. StarClan and everyone else always favored you!"

Frustrated, he shook his fiercely. "No, Dewstar! You were always more popular than I was! Everyone loved you, but you just always pushed them away because you were selfish, killing the cats who raised you behind our backs! Vinetail, Softpelt, Sparrowheart and Brightstar shouldn't have died. They were murdered by you, Dewstar. You're too selfish to admit any of this . . ."

"Then why did I have the bad dream?" whispered Dewstar. "I heard you were saved by some pretty StarClan cat, but I had to kill her!"

Icestar didn't know how to respond, but he did anyways. "Maybe because I have a better heart than you."

Dewstar narrowed his eyes. "That's not true!" he yowled, bowling into Icestar. He pinned him down with claws as he continued. "Your heart is as *dark* as mine."

Icestar wrestled him off of his body, struggling to keep him away. "No, it has never been, you traitor!" He was still pinned, but was struggling to break free.

"That's it!" Dewstar's long claws sliced through Icestar's chest, his muscles pushing his paw down strongly. "You're time is over!" Icestar coughed fiercely, feeling a hot pain slice across his chest. "How does it feel to be murdered by your own brother?"

"D-Dew—star—"

The white tom didn't stop. His fur became stained with his brother's blood, and Icestar felt more pain spread across his chest so

unbearable that he had to yowl. This feeling was worse than what Toadskip had done to him! Not because of the pain of the injury, but because it was his own brother, trying to murder him . . .

Suddenly, the forest croaked. Dewstar stopped before he could get the chance to kill Icestar, and pricked his ears as he looked around the darkness. The forest croaked again, and the ground began to shake. Icestar stopped yowling. He was gasping, still trying to weakly struggle out of under Dewstar while he had the chance.

For a moment, things were silent. Then, the sky flashed brilliantly. A lightning bolt struck down to the trees with an ear-splitting yowl, causing Dewstar to leap into the air with surprise. The trees began to shake from the wind, but one particular tree swayed madly. Before Icestar had time to react, the tree tipped downwards in Dewstar's direction, and fell at the speed of light. It hit the ground with a loud boom.

Icestar staggered upwards. "D-did it get him?" he whispered. He stared at the fallen tree for a heartbeat, his eyes wide. His fur was more blood-soaked then ever, and he felt so weak that he could barely even walk. But he had to see if Dewstar had made it . . .

He limped forward, stumbling to the ground at his first few steps. Icestar slowly stood up again, his legs shaking, and pushed himself to walk even further. *I have to see if my brother is alive*, he thought, urging himself to go forward. His fur was blown the wrong way from the wind as it grew stronger, and his eyes began to sting.

A storm was going to come . . .

The sky split again, and the clouds grew over the forest as a second lightning bolt hit another tree. Icestar jumped, falling back down. At this point, his ears were ringing—the sound was too loud for him to take any more. He barely caught a glimpse of the lightning bolt before it flashed away, but a red haze caught his sight instead. He looked up at the treetops. A purple flame rose from the tree that had been struck, and in a split second it blazed red. Icestar's eyes widened, and the scent of smoke stuck in his throat.

A fire! The forest was going to burn soon. He had to hurry!

He turned around and began to limp as fast as he could, gasping with pain as his injury opened up more. Icestar had to make it back whether Dewstar was dead or alive. He had kits and a Clan to go back to . . . he had to see everyone again!

"H-help," croaked a weak voice. The voice was barely heard over the wind, but he knew it was Dewstar. Icestar whirled around, squinting his eyes against the wind to make out the white-furred tom's leg stuck under the large pine tree. "Help me!" Dewstar yowled, his voice growing stronger.

Icestar's gaze hardened. "Why should I?"

Dewstar looked so weak and vulnerable under the tall tree—it reminded him of his own kits, the way they were the moment they were born. "We're brothers, Icestar," Dewstar pleaded. "I-I'm going to burn to death if you don't save me!"

"Before your leg was crushed, you were going to kill *me*," snarled Icestar, shaking his head. "Why would I save a cat with so much blood on his paws?"

The DarkClan leader silenced. Icestar waited, growing nervous and impatient at the growing flames. Finally, Dewstar spoke. "Fine, Icestar. Go and leave without me. Save yourself and leave me to die!"

Turning around, Icestar thought, *and that's exactly what I'll do!* He looked up at the fire, and noticed it had spread quickly to several other trees, and it was not stopping yet. He wondered if the fighting Clans could see the smoke. He gave one last glance at Dewstar, who's gaze was on the ground, his eyes shut with pain. What was Dewstar thinking?

"You have no time for this, Icestar!" said a new voice. A faint spirit of a cat formed right before Icestar's eyes—and it was Shard. *"Go and save yourself!"*

Icestar was silent for a moment. All that could be heard was the loud wind, and the crackling of the wildfire. Why did Shard come? What did he care about Dewstar?

"I can't," he murmured, knowing very well that Shard had heard him.

"Why can't you?" demanded Shard. *"Dewstar killed so many cats, he doesn't deserve to live. You* must *go now before it is too late!"*

"I must know why!" Icestar snapped, trying to stand taller in front of Shard. "I must know the real reason why Dewstar would do all these things. A true warrior would never let his brother die no matter how much blood he spilled!"

And with that, Icestar whirled around, dragging himself as quick as he could to Dewstar's body. Dewstar didn't look up, let alone acknowledge his presence. He must have not heard him coming.

"Dewstar, get up," demanded Icestar, "I'm getting you out of here."

The white-furred tom's head slowly raised, and he looked up, spotting Icestar. "I thought you left," he said coldly, his blue eyes full of despair. "This is what I deserve after all, right? You won't be so popular anymore if you save me."

"This is something I have to do," snapped Icestar. "I'm getting you out no matter what!" He looked up at the fire, and it had spread much faster than he anticipated. The tip of the pine tree that was crushing Dewstar was also in flames, and he knew that if he didn't get Dewstar out fast enough, both of them would burn to death nine times over-or in Icestar's case—eight times.

He began to pick at the loose bark on the tree, ripping off as much as he could to expose Dewstar's leg more. He did this as fast as he could, keeping an eye on the fire that was quickly approaching.

"If you're going to get out, you've got to help," ordered Icestar, once he exposed Dewstar's crushed leg as much as he could. "Pull yourself with your free paws, got it? I'm going to try to get your leg out." Dewstar didn't respond, but had simply nodded. "This is going to hurt a lot."

Icestar grabbed Dewstar's leg with his jaws, and began to pull. Dewstar grunted in pain, and forced himself forward, his body

beginning to shake. As Icestar continued to dig the ground and pull his brother, his own wound started to hurt less and less as he slowly forgot about it.

The fire was now covering the whole tree. Dewstar's fur was singeing and Icestar began to cough due to the smoke, but he didn't give up. With a loud yowl, Dewstar finally pulled himself free. His leg was nearly flat and disoriented-looking, covered in blood and splinters from the wood.

"Let's get out of here!" choked Icestar, his throat filling with smoke. "Hurry!"

Dewstar struggled upwards and the two of them leaned on each other, supporting one another as they limped as fast as they could away from the clearing. "W-wait!" Dewstar gasped, stopping suddenly. "We're going the wrong way . . ."

"What do you mean?" demanded Icestar.

"The ditch!" Dewstar said, his voice filled with panic. "It's the way we're going—and there's no other way out. Look!" Both of them turned around, to see that a line of trees on fire covered their path. "Only one of us will make it."

"No, we'll both get through!" he snapped, shaking his head with disbelief. "We'll find another way out, I promise!"

Dewstar growled with frustration. "Listen, I can't properly walk anymore! My leg is too badly messed up. I won't be able to run—but you can. You're stronger than me at this point, and you're the only one that will make it anyways."

"What do you mean?" asked Icestar. "I didn't save you just so you could die!"

He shook his head. "That's how it's going to be . . . I'm far too hated to gain back a place in the Clans anyways. If Woodclaw's alive, he'll be the new leader of DarkClan."

"Woodclaw's dead," Icestar said, "And so is Ashtail. They died fighting each other. The battle turned tides, and we're winning

now."

Dewstar remained silent after those words. He was staring down at his paws, a guilty look in his eyes. "I . . . killed all those cats," he said after some time, "and they're gone forever because of me." He didn't look back up. "When I got stuck under the branch, I saw all the cats I've killed. They came to me, and made me open my eyes, Icestar."

"What made you do it?" he asked.

"I told you—a dream," Dewstar replied, his voice filled with shame. "Many, many dreams. The cat who told me to kill the StarClan she-cat was the one who told me to kill my other victims. He made me join DarkClan and become its leader."

"That's terrible," whispered Icestar. "Why did you listen to that cat?"

Dewstar gulped. "Because he threatened he'd kill you if I didn't listen to him." For a moment, he paused. "That cat's name was Shard." The moment Dewstar said Shard, the fire grew much larger than it had been before. Icestar was shocked. Shard . . . made Dewstar turn dark? "Over time, he threatened he'd kill my friends, that he'd kill Dawnstripe, and destroy MoonClan. He told me this so much, I lost who I was and soon started listening to everything he said. I listened to Shard, and you should have left me to die."

Icestar was in disbelief. Shard, the one who had been on his side since the start? The one who gave him one of his nine lives? Was it really *that* Shard? "I shouldn't have left you to die," he whispered. "Featherbreeze told me long ago not to become dark in order to defeat darkness."

Dewstar's ears flicked at the mention of their mother, but he beckoned his head forward. "L-let's go," he coughed, stumbling on his words. "Let's get out of here."

Icestar nodded. "Yes, it's not safe anymore."

"Icestar, watch out!" Dewstar suddenly howled, leaping into the air bowling into Icestar. A tree had crashed where they had been

standing. His eyes were wide as he stared at their position. Dewstar really wasn't a bad cat . . . his heart wasn't so dark anymore, right?

"Dewstar!" called Icestar, looking around. "Are you okay?"

The tree caught up in flames in moments. Icestar looked around more quickly, afraid that Dewstar had been crushed again. What if he did? What if he was burning to his death right now? More horrible thoughts filled in his mind as he searched around. His chest was tightening because of the smoke, and his throat burned like crazy.

"Where are you?" demanded Icestar, continuing to search around even though the smoke was weakening him.

His ears pricked when he heard coughing in the distance. "I-I'm here!" Dewstar's words caught Icestar, and he whirled around to see nothing.

"Where?" he asked, looking around quickly. "I don't see you!" When Dewstar didn't respond, he wondered if it was just his imagination. Suddenly, he saw the cliff-edge, and his eyes widened. He ran over and looked down, scared to see if Dewstar was dead.

"I'm stuck!" coughed Dewstar. Finally, Icestar saw his brother, clinging onto the rocks below, right out of Icestar's reach.

"Oh StarClan . . ." gasped Icestar. "Let me help you up!" He reached a paw down, but Dewstar didn't even attempt to pull himself up. "Come on, what are you doing?" he demanded.

Dewstar's paws were shaking, as if they were going to give out any minute. "Leave me here," he said, a serious look in his eyes. "You won't be able to reach me. I deserve this anyways." His voice wavered as he weakened.

"No, you don't! Nothing's your fault—you finally came to your senses, Dewstar! You don't deserve this!" Icestar pleaded. "Come on, please!"

Dewstar shook his head. "It's either me . . . or you." His weak body seemed like it had finally given in. "I'll watch over you, wherever I

end up. It's better this way . . ." His paws, which had been clinging on to the cliff-edge had finally used the last of it's strength.

"No!" Icestar yowled, trying to grab Dewstar with his claws, but it was too late. He was already falling, he was going to die. "It didn't have to be this way, you idiot!" he shouted, coughing and choking on his words. *I've got to get out of here!* he thought. Dewstar's fate had already been sealed, and there was no way to bring him back. The time to leave was now.

An aching tugged at Icestar's heart as he stared down the ditch. The feeling of loosing Dewstar as well was a great pain. He turned around, and looked at the burning trees. He'll have to wait out this fiery storm . . .

"Dewstar," Icestar murmured, as his eyes slowly opened. Suddenly, he jumped. Dewstar! He turned around, wondering where his brother had gone, but a feeling of grief made his stomach go cold once he spotted the ditch. *He died for me,* thought Icestar, *and I didn't do anything to save him . . .*

The pine trees were burned to a crisp all around him as he slowly walked through DarkClan's forest. He didn't remember falling asleep. How long had it been? Who won the battle? It was hard to think of these thoughts as he staggered along. He was too upset. His heart hurt too much to care.

Dewstar shouldn't have died . . . he did everything to let Icestar live, and yet he ended up with such a tragic fate. *Everyone who did and didn't know him will continue to hate him forever,* he thought. He was only trying to do something good, which had ended horribly.

Icestar lost track of time and the direction of where he was headed. He knew he had been staggering mindlessly in this forest for a while, but he forgot where he was going. His lungs hurt—his throat was sore. Every bad feeling in the world seemed to return to him.

What do I do now? Icestar thought. He stopped walking, and looked up to the sky. The sun was up—he hadn't noticed before. The battle

must be over. Which Clan had survived, and which one had perished?

Finally, he came across the clearing in which the battle took place. It was littered with dead bodies and pooling with red blood. The stench of death was deep, and it made Icestar want to vomit although he had nothing in his stomach to empty out. He quickly strode past the clearing and entered into MoonClan's forests, feeling sick.

Dewstar would have loved to return here once again. If only he could have . . . things would be better. Icestar wasn't sure if he should continue traveling in MoonClan. What if there was no camp to return to? What if DarkClan won the battle—and all his friends were dead?

Silverleaf, he thought weakly. What if Silverleaf and their kits were gone?

He walked uneasily, limping heavily on his sore paws. The cuts and wounds on his body stung, but it was nothing compared to his grief.

Then, he stopped. The camp was in sight. He pricked his ears, hoping to hear voices. He didn't want to stumble into another dead battlefield. As his ears strained forward, he heard faint talking. *Please, let it be my Clanmates*, thought Icestar as he weakly made his way forward.

As he got close to the camp walls, words could be distinguished through the voices b

"Do you . . . do you think Icestar didn't make it?" asked a she-cat. He recognized the voice to be Goldsun.

Relief washed over Icestar; MoonClan had survived.

"I hope not," said Squirreltail, "but he had been missing for quite some time. Amberpaw said that he went after Dewstar, but no one knows how that turned out. Everyone's thinking that . . ."

"Don't say it," Flameheart snapped, cutting Squirreltail off. "I have faith Icestar lived. After all, he has so many things to live for!"

Icestar was glad that his Clanmates had faith in him. *I'm right here; alive*, he thought. He limped forward, his eyes on the camp entrance. He was going to see everyone again . . .

He passed through the thickets that protected the entrance, and stopped once he was inside. For a moment, no cat noticed him. Swiftstar was here, although his Clanmates seemed to have returned home. Sweetheart was running to and forth from the medicine den and the warriors den, while Amberpaw and Blackpaw were helping repair the walls that were broken with a few older warriors.

"Sharpfang," Icestar called. The dark-furred warrior was standing just a few whiskers away. At the mention of his name, he whirled around and his eyes widened.

"Icestar!" Sharpfang gasped loudly. At the mention of Icestar's name, everyone seemed to stop what they were doing. Goldsun, Squirreltail and Flameheart looked up from where they were sitting. Relief seemed to flood all over their eyes, but looks of horror replaced their faces once they saw how wounded Icestar was.

In a moment, he was crowded by the Clan, and everyone began to devour him with questions. He didn't respond—he didn't really know how to after all. The feeling of grief wasn't easily forgotten, but a new feeling of happiness came across him.

Icestar could see Silverleaf pushing past the crowd of cats. Some cats let her pass, because after all, she was Icestar's mate. When she got past the last cat, she looked up at him with relieved shiny eyes. "You survived," she mewed. "I'm so glad you're back!"

"Yeah," he agreed, his voice weak. "I'm home."

Okaaaay. This was one of my longest, if not THE longest chapter that I've written in this book (over 8,000 words)! After two loooong months, I finally finished chapter 60! Inform me if you see a mistake, and I really hoped you liked it. I'm not gonna give a teary author's note yet, because next I'm posting an epilogue. Don't worry, the epilogue won't take as long as

chapter 60!

Now let me emotionally recover from everything I've written....and I'll see you when the Epilogue is out :)

Epilogue

Edited ✔

It's been two days since the battle between MoonClan, CloudClan and DarkClan. There hasn't been a disturbance in the forest ever since. Most of the time, Icestar had rested in his den, sleeping as much as he could just like Sweetheart instructed. He didn't get a chance to speak to most of his Clanmates even though he wanted to, but he was grateful he had listened to her.

His belly was warm and full of a squirrel he just finished. He stretched out, feeling more relaxed than he had in seasons. He also thought about Dewstar . . . with him dead, this prophecy must be over, right? He felt a pain in his heart as he thought about his brother, but he pushed it past him. Wherever Dewstar ended up, he must be watching now.

He felt a presence by the den entrance. "Hey, Icestar," his new deputy, Sharpfang, called. "Sweetheart is calling you."

He stood up from his spot, and limped outside of the den, following Sharpfang to the medicine den. Sweetheart had been busy for days, treating all the wounded and making sure that the severely injured would live. The warriors who could still stand spent these last two days hunting and fixing up camp. Things had been managing, and MoonClan was slowly pulling themselves back up.

Once Icestar entered the den, he smiled at Sweetheart. "You look busy."

"And you look much better than you did two days ago," she commented, with a nod of approval. "I just wanted to change your cobwebs. After this, you should go see Silverleaf. She's been wanting to see to you."

"Everybody's been wanting to see him," Sharpfang said, amused. "He's a hero."

Icestar purred. "Amberpaw's the hero. Without her bringing CloudClan, we'd have never won the battle."

"Both of your stories will be told for as long as MoonClan stands," said Fireshade, who was recovering near the back of the den. "And Goldenpaw, too . . ." He looked outside the den, his eyes filling with sorrow.

"Ashtail will be remembered also," said Swiftbreeze. "But I wish he could've lived to see our kits." Just a day ago Swiftbreeze had told the Clan she was expecting Ashtail's kits. It shocked everyone, but of course the Clan was happy that there'd be new young ones, especially after all the losses the Clan had faced.

As Sweetheart changed Icestar's cobwebs, he wished that he could mention Dewstar. Nobody would understand the truth in Dewstar's heart, so there was no point in doing so. Every cat will always remember him as a monster. But deep down inside, Icestar will always remember him as a cat doing bad things with a good intention.

"You're ready to go," Sweetheart finally said.

Icestar nodded gratefully and clambered out of the medicine den, looking around for Silverleaf. He wasn't surprised to see her suckling their two newborn kits in the nursery den. They've been born only a few days ago, yet Silverleaf and Icestar never got the chance to name them. He was excited just for that.

When she looked up and saw him, her eyes brightened. "I finally get to see you," she purred when he reached her.

"Sweetheart told me I can," he responded. "How are those two holding off?"

"Like warriors," she replied. "Our daughter's fierce. Our son is more calm."

Icestar watched them lovingly. The she-kit had black soft-looking fur, with white paws and a white tail-tip.

"She reminds me of a raven," Silverleaf said. "So, that's what I

wanted to name her . . . Ravenkit."

"It suits her perfectly," Icestar agreed.

"I think you should name him," she mewed, pointing to the tom kit with her nose.

He studied him carefully. His fur was off-white like snow. How about Snowkit? *No*, he thought, *it doesn't suit him*. He didn't like the selections that kept coming to his mind; Coldkit, Frostkit, Waterkit . . . none of them suited him. He even considered naming him Ashkit, but the name just did not stick.

The kit's eyes opened slowly, revealing a dark blue. Icestar's eyes widened. This blue was nothing like Silverbreeze's light eye—and especially not Icestar's amber eyes. Instead, it reminded him a lot like Dewstar.

"Dewkit," Icestar said suddenly. "That's . . . that's what I want to name him."

Her ears pricked, surprised. "Why Dewkit? You know all the terrible things Dewstar has done to our Clan. He *murdered* your father!"

Icestar nodded. "I know, but I was with him in his last moments," he admitted. "In the end, Dewstar was good. He didn't want to do the things he did."

"Then why did he do them?" Silverleaf asked softly.

"So that I may live," whispered Icestar. "It is true that he's done terrible things . . . but I'll see it that Dewkit won't turn out to be influenced as badly as Dewstar. In the end, Dewstar regretted everything he's done, and like I said, his heart was good."

"Are you sure?" asked Silverleaf, looking at the white tom kit.

Icestar nodded. "Him being named Dewkit won't make me love him any less. I'm sure."

Silverleaf licked the kit's head. "Then Dewkit it is," she agreed. "I may not know what Dewstar was like in those moments you speak

of, but I'll keep it in my mind when I think of him. I hope you are sure about this."

"I'm sure," Icestar said. "Dewkit and Ravenkit shall be their names." He looked up to the starry sky of Silverpelt. He wondered if all of the cats who he ever loved and died were approving of this choice right now.

Dewstar, thought Icestar, staring up at the crescent moon. *Watch over my kits. This prophecy is over . . . but this adventure will continue.*

STORY COMPLETE

Okay guys, THIS STORY IS COMPLETED. I'm pretty sure you all noticed . . . and oh my goodness, this is such a sad moment. I never actually thought I would complete it. After like ten chapters, I decided to put an end to this book, but then a couple of people commented how good it was, thus causing me to continue. Icetail's Enemy was never popular up until Part Two came out as well, believe it or not. The amount of readers I have definitely grew a lot over the past two years I've been writing this.

To thank you all, I decided to write a list. This list will be about facts of my book, because there are so many things I changed throughout the book. If you just want to skip the list and get straight on to the announcements, just scroll down.

THINGS YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ICETAIL'S ENEMY

-Icetail's name was originally going to be Icefur, but that sounded too girly, causing me to change it.

-I never intended to make Dewfang the enemy, but to make the book more interesting, I did.

-I actually removed the carrot thing.

-I never planned a huge backstory about DarkClan in the first place. I just suddenly got the idea throughout writing the book, because I didn't want to make it seem that MoonClan and DarkClan fought often for no reason.

-I was originally going to make Sharpfang Icestar's first deputy, and have him die instead of Ashtail, but I decided against it.

-I was originally going to make Dawnstripe and Icetail become mates, but then I reasoned with myself that Dewfang was the more

popular one anyways so it's more reasonable to have her fall in love with him instead.

-I was also going to have Dawnstripe join Dewfang because she loves him, but I decided against it.

-I was going to have Silverleaf die in the battle, but then I reasoned with myself that Icestar deserves some happiness.

-I also wanted to make Silverleaf die during kitting but then I also reasoned with myself how sad it would be.

-I never intended on making Silverleaf and Icestar have kits in the first place. I was going to make them have kits in the epilogue, but then I wanted more drama . . . so then I ended up changing that.

-Brightstar was supposed to die during the war in the very last chapter, but then I wanted Icetail to have a nine lives ceremony, and to be the same rank as Dewstar.

-Lilyclaw was never intended to be made. I just decided, "Eh, why not."

-I was going to make Dewstar have kits but then another idea came into mind, which I will not share with you because it has to do with the upcoming sequel.

-Speaking of the sequel, I never intended to make one. But I just enjoyed writing this book so much that I decided that I should.

-Dropeyes' name was changed from Dropeyes to Shiningmoon. Nobody liked "Dropeyes" so it's now "Shiningmoon." I wanted to add "moon" to the prefix of her name because her name before joining the Clan was originally "Moon," but had been changed by Brightstar to something entirely different in respect to the name of MoonClan.

-Shiningmoon and Silverleaf were going to be enemies, but instead I made them into best friends.

-I was only going to make Icestar have one kit.

-Then, I was going to make him have three kits. Somehow, I stuck

with two.

-I planned to make this book like 25-30 chapters, but I accidentally made 60.

-As I got into Part Three of this book, I decided that each part will be a different book. For example, Part One is Book One, Part Two is Book Two, and Part Three is Book Three.

-I was going to have some history of how MoonClan, CloudClan, MarshClan and StreamClan came to be, involving the original Clans, but then I decided it was too much work xD

-I actually got inspired of this book from a role-play. The role-play had NOTHING to do with the events of this book, so I don't know how my other ideas blossomed. The only thing inspired from the role-play were the characters. There had indeed been cats named Brightstar, Silverkit (she only made it to apprentice before I stopped that role-play), Dawnpaw, and my brother Dewpaw. My character was Icepaw(fur, star).

-Icestar was supposed to have blue eyes but then I got annoyed that most warriors fan fictions have a blue-eyed protagonist, so I made his eyes amber.

* * *

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I'll try to have the sequel up in December or January. I can't give a specific date yet, so stay tuned until it's out! It will be called **Warrior Cats: The New Course (Icetail's Enemy Sequel)**. The book will be in the point of view of Icestar, Dewkit and Ravenkit, because I want the book to be refreshed from having Icestar's point of view for so long. This book will of course be located on my profile, under works.

The expecting date for **Warrior Cats: The New Course to be published is January 1, 2016.**

Icetail's Enemy is almost complete with its editing as well!

Concluding this part, *Warriors: Icetail's Enemy* is COMPLETE!

THE SEQUEL IS UP!

I really encourage you to check the sequel out if you want to continue the series!

Here's the blurb:

Everyone knows how Icestar's brother died in the Battle of Darkness. As the false Clan is gone, everyone hopes for peace, but within due time they realize that things are not over yet. The Twolegs begin to eat up the forest, and right below their paws, the caverns are changing the home for all four warrior Clans. As tree falls after tree, Icestar knows that he has to lead everyone away, even if it meant to drag the remaining proud leaders with him.

Meanwhile, Icestar's kits face troubles as well. Dewkit, born with the looks and name of Dewstar, gets judged daily as if nobody would accept him for it. Ravenkit lets her ambitions get the best of herself. Time and time again, she only causes trouble, and at these extreme circumstances, extreme measures must be taken. Both kits realize that their paths are much different than their Clanmates---especially with a new prophecy on both of their paws. Will all three cats let their true fates take hold, or will they change the course of the Clans with their own hearts?

I hope you're excited, because I know I am! The prologue and chapter one is going to be posted on January 1st, 2016. Add it to your library so that when the day comes, you'll be able to get a notification about it!